Commentary
November 1998

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Daniel Pipes

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Peter W. Huber

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Brand-Name Opera
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CONTROVERSY

Does IQ Matter?
Christopher F. Chabris & Critics

Books in Review
Richard Pipes • Yossi Prager • David Brooks
Daniel Casse • Algis Valiunas

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November 1998

Letters from Readers

Irving Howe

To the Editor:

Irving Howe deserves better from both Commentary and Joseph Epstein than he receives in "The Old People's Socialist League" [August]. After all, as Edward Alexander notes in his biography of Howe, "between August 1946 and January 1980, Howe published 35 articles and reviews in Commentary." In essays like "The New York Intellectuals" (October 1968), Howe distinguished himself as one of the earliest, most articulate, and most balanced critics of the New Left and the counterculture. Criticizing the New Left for its anti-Americanism, its authoritarianism, and its irrationalism, Howe both anticipated and influenced the neoconservative direction Commentary would take in the early 1970's. Even today, much conservative rhetoric about the evil of the 60's is merely a third-hand regurgitation of ideas first expressed clearly and cleanly by Irving Howe.

In his maturity, Howe's political ideas were not a simple-minded quasi-religious adherence to the socialist pieties of his youth. Rather, Howe sought to salvage what was still living in the socialist heritage by merging it with liberalism. (On cultural issues, he was also open to conservative ideas.) Because American liberalism is so infused with Emersonian individualism and so temperamentally hostile to the claims of community and group solidarity, the alliance Howe sought to create was inherently difficult and unstable. Yet outside the United States, in countries like Canada or Great Britain, where labor unions and social-democratic parties still have a strong presence in public life, Howe's ideas about a liberal-socialist alliance are both realistic and useful.

We are also told that Howe's socialism "marred much of his literary criticism." In support of this contention, Mr. Epstein cites Howe's treatment of Henry James and Joseph Conrad in *Politics and the Novel* (1957). Now, *Politics and the Novel* happens to be one of Howe's earliest books, written only a few years after he ceased to be a Trotskyite. As Howe himself admitted in the preface to the 1987 edition, he was somewhat embarrassed by the youthful bravado of the book:

> How could the earlier self whom I struggle to recall have written with such assurance about Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* or been so withholding in appreciation of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*?

As he matured as a critic, especially in the last two decades of his life, Howe's voice lost its dogmatism and became more nuanced, more precise, and more responsive to other points of view. James and Conrad, to take the examples Mr. Epstein uses, are much better treated in Howe's marvelous posthumous collection, *A Critic's Notebook* (1994). Or, from the same book, consider the perceptive generosity and affection of Howe's comments on Kipling:

> One great flaw in the reforming passion is that in its eagerness to remedy social wrongs it tends to neglect, certainly to undervalue, the experience of those whose lives it wishes to improve. . . . Now Kipling, it is true, did not see India as particularly oppressed, and I am as ready as the next liberal or radical to deplore this failure; but he did see the people of India as vigorous, full of humor and energy, deeply worthy. How are we to explain that in the pages of this apologist for imperialism, the masses of India seem more alive and autonomous than in the pages of writers claiming political correctness?

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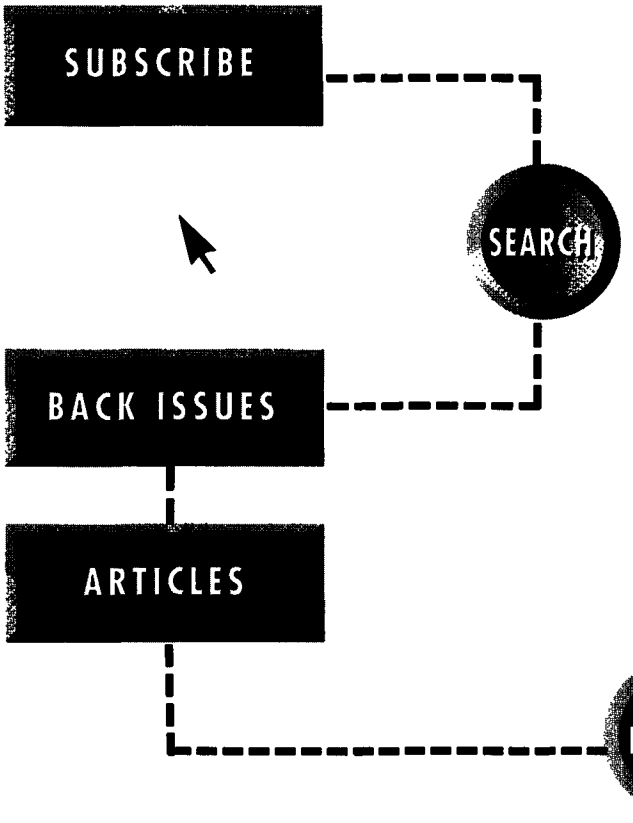

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These are not the words of someone who let politics blight his response to literature.

In his *Selected Writings, A Critic's Notebook*, and the many uncollected essays from the last decades of his life, Howe left a legacy of criticism notable for its maturity, its ability to balance competing claims, and its responsiveness to the complexity of the world. The "rhetorical flourishes" of his early prose gave way to a style of great lucidity and equipoise. In an age of academic jargon, he continued to speak to the common reader.

The epigraph to Mr. Epstein's article is a quotation from Isaac Bashevis Singer that begins, "A wonderful man, Irving Howe." Howe was, indeed, "a wonderful man." COMMENTARY, which was happy to publish him while he lived, should be more respectful of his memory.

JEET HEER
Toronto, Ontario
Canada

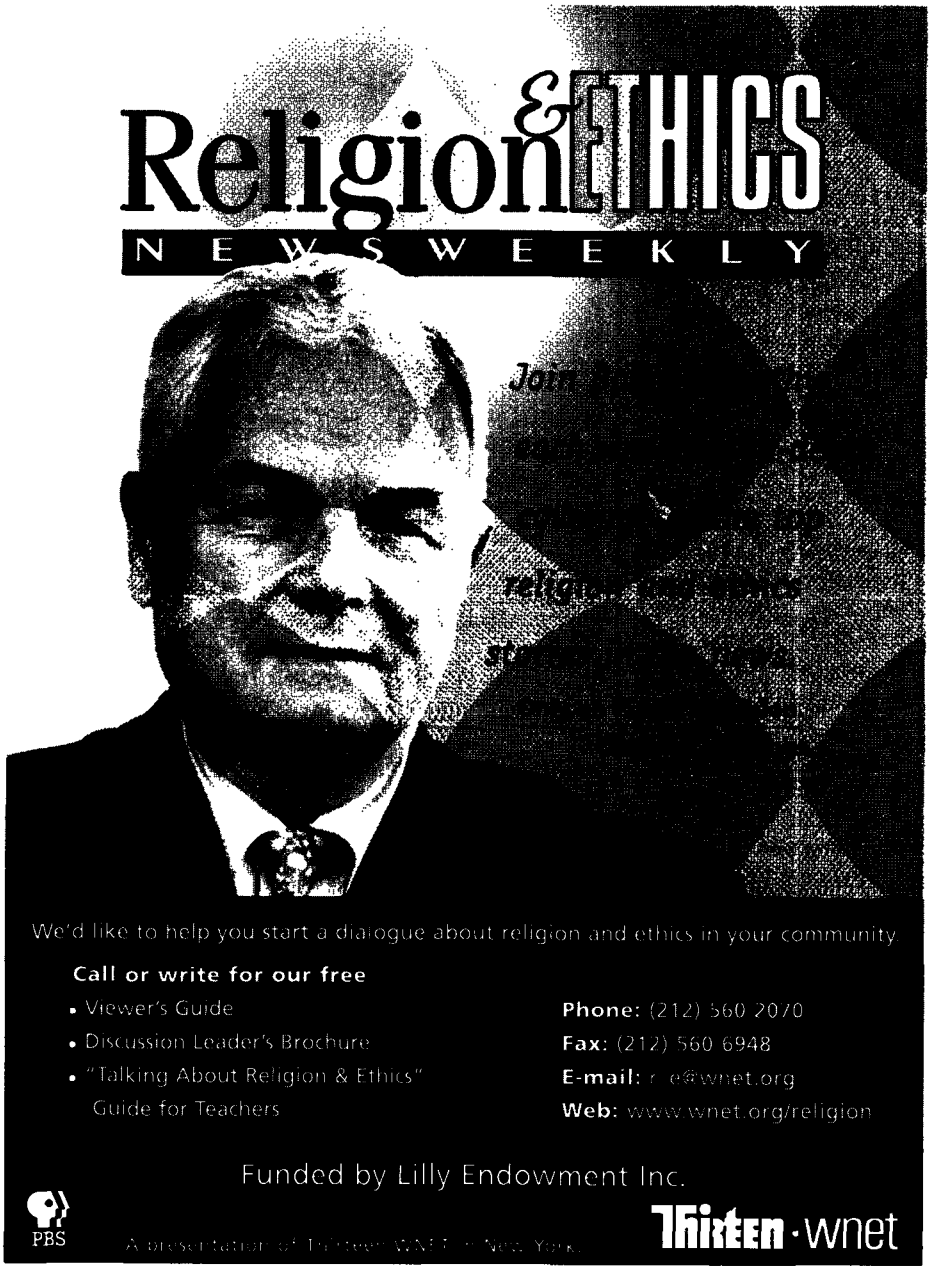
TO THE EDITOR:

Joseph Epstein claims that Irving Howe's socialist politics made most of his literary criticism worthless, and even forced him to deny the gifts of Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Howe wrote critically on these two writers but he did not dispute their greatness. Moreover, if Mr. Epstein were fair enough to include Howe's insights on other writers with whom he disagreed politically, such as Dostoevsky, Stendahl, and Faulkner, COMMENTARY readers would learn that, for Howe, the literary quality of a work, its depth and complexity, were more important than any particular "political message." Early in his literary career Howe wrote:

> Let it be remembered that two of the world's literary masterpieces, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, are expositions of reactionary ideologies. That does not prevent any sensible person from reading them again and again.

Mr. Epstein also claims that James's "tragic view of life . . . is entirely at odds" with Howe's own "politics-ridden mentality." But it was Howe who said of Dostoevsky that "No other novelist has dramatized so powerfully the values and dangers, the uses and corruptions of systematized thought." And for Howe what made André Malraux's *Man's Fate* successful as a work of literature was the tension it generates between Malraux's mystique of the deed and his awareness of the waste and failure in historical action. Along with Kyo, the main protagonist of the novel, Howe seems chastened by the message that "political struggle is not the true end of man's life."

The examples could be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multiplied a hundredfold. But Mr. Epstein selects from Howe's *Politics and the Novel* only what he needs to beat up on his old mentor and benefactor. And he has to beat up on him because Howe continued to call himself a socialist until the end, even though socialism had become for him less a political than a personal persuasion, less a blueprint for the future than a moral influence, a way of measuring, and responding to, changes in American culture.

GERALD SORIN
State University of New York
New Paltz, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

May I offer a factual correction to Joseph Epstein's sly whimsy in discussing Irving Howe and other radicals of his generation, including myself? He writes that Howe changed his name from Horenstein, and that

> [h]e was hardly the only Jew in the "movement" to do so, the ostensible purpose being to secure a broader American audience for the views of these budding radicals. Thus Daniel Bell was originally Daniel Bolotsky.

I was born Daniel Bolotsky (and never made a secret of it) but my father died when I was an infant in the influenza epidemic of 1920, and my legal guardian became my uncle Dr. Samuel Bolotsky, a dentist. In 1931, when I was twelve years old, my guardian changed his name legally to Dr. Samuel Bell, and my brother and I, his wards, had our names changed as well. Since some persons regard Mr. Epstein as a writer of record, I wish the correction to stand.

DANIEL BELL
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Although grateful for Joseph Epstein's generous remarks about my book on Irving Howe, I think that one of his factual assertions needs correction. He says that Howe suffered "no known writers' blocks, [was] never (apparently) an analysand. . . ." But in one of the livelier personal anecdotes in a generally impersonal autobiography, Howe describes "going to a therapist in San Francisco" whose name in Hebrew meant "dog." When Howe complained to "Dr. Dog" that he felt so bad he wanted to be hospitalized, the doctor asked what had happened to him that week. "Well," reported the patient, "I had written a little, though badly, and had had an encounter with a woman, not too bad. . . ." To which the merciless therapist replied: "A little creativity, a little sexuality—my God, who can stand it?" So it would appear that Howe did not have writers' block, but did have an analyst.

EDWARD ALEXANDER
Seattle, Washington

JOSEPH EPSTEIN writes:

I would argue with at least two of Jeet Heer's points about Irving Howe. The first is that he "anticipated and influenced the neoconservative direction COMMENTARY would take in the early 1970's." That would be a hellacious thing to have to prove. Irving Howe wrote some very good things in COMMENTARY after the magazine's turn against the radical Left, but that turn was already well in evidence by the time "The New York Intellectuals" appeared. It was because he agreed with it that Howe desired to publish the essay in COMMENTARY in the first place. In any event, it would be only a short matter of time before he began to consider that the much greater menace on the American political scene—and the greater threat to his own brand of leftism—was represented by, precisely, neoconservatism.

The other point I would argue with is Mr. Heer's contention that Irving Howe became a more mature and nuanced thinker as he grew older. This is only partly true. When his political views were directly confronted, he tended to return to form. For an example, I recommend that Mr. Heer read the older Irving Howe on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Since Gerald Sorin's letter recapitulates Mr. Heer's, with concision and rancor added, there is no need to say anything further about it, except perhaps to point out that Irving Howe was never, in any sense, my "mentor," a word Mr. Sorin uses with today's confident intellectual sloppiness. I have had no mentors, never wanted one—I ain't no mentee—and do not wish ever to be anyone else's.

I am glad to have Daniel Bell's factual correction concerning the origin of the change in his family name.

The Greeks

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Learning from the Greeks" [August], Algis Valiunas revisits a subject that has been important in my intellectual life since I decided, in the spring of 1973, to major in archeology. In those pre-politically-correct days, all archeology majors were required to take two years of Latin or Greek. I chose Greek, and was thereby exposed to some of the literature discussed in the article in the original. In other courses I became familiar with the then-current translations of the Greek classics, although I have not looked at the recent translations discussed in the article.

I do not disagree with anything Mr. Valiunas says, but I think two points could use even more emphasis. He cites the Greek philosophers' discovery of reason as a powerful, if not the most powerful, of human faculties. I think this discovery is even more fateful and amazing than the article makes it appear. In ancient Greece, the material manifestations of the belief in reason that we have today, such as science and technology, had not yet developed beyond those of other civilizations. At that time, to believe in reason as a means of understanding the world required a leap of faith so huge we can barely comprehend it. It is only in the light of subsequent events that faith in reason appears as a logical development in Western civilization.

In more recent times, reason came to be worshipped almost as a religion, one that has been responsible for much chaos in Western culture and politics. The ideologues who created the French Revolution renamed Notre Dame cathedral in Paris the Temple of Wisdom, and like many intellectuals before and since, believed so strongly in reason that they were willing to destroy anything that did not agree with their rationalist view of how society should be structured.

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The second point I want to make is that in ancient Greek culture, reason rarely achieved so total an ascendancy over tradition as it was later to develop in Western culture. The Greeks recognized something we (or at least our academics) have forgotten: that the important decisions in life and politics are often nonrational, or perhaps transrational.

At the end of the article, Mr. Valiunas very properly brings up religion. One element conspicuously absent from ancient Greek thought (and profoundly present in the biblical tradition) is a strong notion of righteousness as a good in itself. In many Greek authors, not only in Thucydides, whom Mr. Valiunas cites, justice seems merely a negotiating position or a rationalization of self-interest. Classical thought, therefore, should not be used as a substitute for religion but as something different in kind. Keeping in mind this limitation, recognized by the Greeks themselves, we can go on learning from the Greeks for generations to come.

A. STEVEN TOBY
Arlington, Virginia

ALGIS VALIUNAS writes:

A. Steven Toby is exactly right when he points out the stunning innovation of Greek philosophy. Reading Plato or Aristotle, one cannot but marvel at the radical boldness of the philosophical undertaking: to know the world by force of mind alone. And Mr. Toby is right, too, when he notes the barbaric consequences of modern attempts to remake humanity in accordance with some idea or other; certain aspects of thought since the Enlightenment demonstrate a quite irrational belief in the power of reason.

It is essential to remember that the perfect city Socrates and his friends speak of in Plato's *Republic* exists only in their speech, only in their thought. Greek philosophers did not share their modern colleagues' passion to change the world; for the Greeks, it was enough to understand it, so far as reason allowed.

African-American Literature

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay [June], Phillip M. Richards insightfully describes the special satirical interaction between the characteristic expressions of black folk culture and the black denigration of American reality that has come to be called "signifying." He deftly outlines the contradictory nature of this interaction, with its combination of acquiescence and subversion, deference and rebellion. Beyond this, however, Mr. Richards goes astray. He proceeds to launch a two-pronged attack on current African-American literary studies and on black intellectuals.

First, he claims that the idea espoused by Henry Louis Gates and others that modern African-American literature is rooted in black folk culture is erroneous. His second charge is that this "literary ideology" is designed to mask "a larger psychological confusion that characterizes a fair portion of the growing African-American bourgeoisie . . . [the need] to keep up adversarial appearances while staying within the 'system.'"

His first charge is presented in the following passage:

> [Henry Louis] Gates's conception [of signifying] has been very influential in the academy, where it serves to make a claim for the place of black literature within American high culture by grounding it, with a winning show of defiance, in low or folk culture. . . . [But] there is, in fact, no evidence that the earliest black writers in America were influenced by folk culture; nor did folk culture play a significant role in the main

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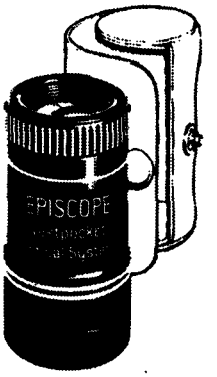

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line of African-American literature for most of the 19th century. . . . The folk-vernacular style in black literature made its first appearance in the late 19th century. But even then it subsisted for quite a long time alongside the more powerful genteel tendencies before it finally—and only partially—overtook them.

But Mr. Richards's account of the historical record is just wrong. To begin with, his emphasis on the first 75 years of the 19th century is of little real significance, for the black literature of that era was what I would call "proto-modern." What I would call the "generic-modern" era of black literature emerges around the 1870's. In this period, the dominant strain of black writing was created through the aesthetic prism of generic black cultural forms. Such literature first clearly surfaced in the poetry of Paul Lawrence Dunbar in the 1890's, though there were antecedents in the poetry and short stories of Albery A. Whitman in the 1870's and 1880's. Above all, as Eric Sundquist's brilliant study, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*, makes patently clear, it was the works of Charles W. Chestnutt (especially *The Marrow of Tradition*) at the dawn of the 20th century that, to repeat Mr. Richards's dismissive characterization of this development, grounded black literature in "low or folk [black] culture."

To support his arguments, Mr. Richards turns to the work of the Howard University scholar Sterling Brown. He suggests, quite erroneously, that Brown's writings were informed by what Mr. Richards views as the putative high moralism of mainline white American literature. This is a rather skewed picture of Brown in that it ignores his work as a creative writer, which was unmistakably shaped by the expressive forms of black folk culture.

Mr. Richards's second charge is also false. This is his contention that the black intellectuals in African-American literary studies have fabricated their understanding of black literature as rooted in black folk culture as a means of masking their confusion vis-à-vis the racist legacies of the American system, on the one hand, and their obsessive quest for assimilation into that same bourgeois-materialistic system, on the other. Such an argument is merely an extension of Mr. Richards's own, essentially establishmentarian, ideological affinities.

Of course there is real tension in the interaction of the black intelligentsia with America in the post-civil-rights era. This tension stems from the goals of the black intelligentsia to uproot the vestiges of white supremacism in the system while still finding their place within it. But this contradictory pattern is hardly limited to the African-American professional, as Mr. Richards wrongly asserts. It is a contradiction associated necessarily with genuine progressive endeavors at humanizing and egalitarianizing the persistent remnants of oppressive forms in democratic-capitalist civilization—racist, sexist, homophobic, and plutocratic remnants.

MARTIN KILSON
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

PHILLIP M. RICHARDS writes:

Martin Kilson raises important points that need to be addressed. To begin with, he questions the significance of the body of African-American literature that existed before the end of the 19th century, maintaining that it had no influence on the modern era of black literature that began with the introduction of "generic black cultural forms" in the last quarter of the 19th century by Charles W. Chestnutt and other writers.

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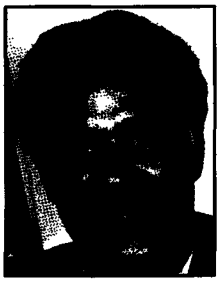

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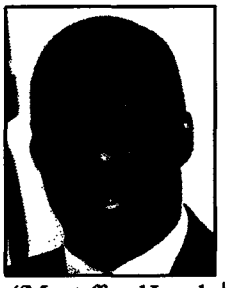

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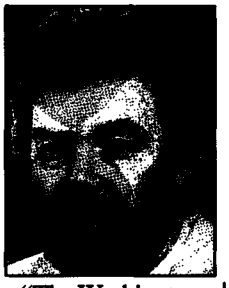

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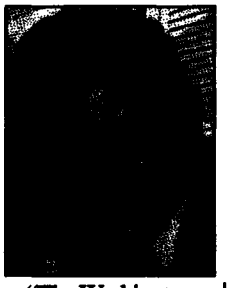

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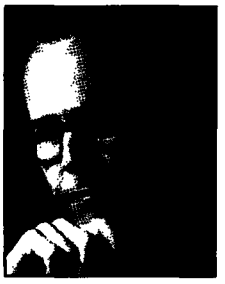

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African-American literary tradition extends from the late 1760's with the poetry of Phillis Wheatley until the end of Reconstruction and includes the universally recognized autobiographies of Frederick Douglass in the 1840's and 1850's as well as the work of a number of other writers in a variety of genres. These writers figured importantly in the arguments of the abolitionists for the end of slavery.

There later developed a Victorian literature whose works—largely by women—played a central role in the formation of late 19th-century black middle-class culture. Indeed, for all his experiments with the folk genre, Charles Chestnutt (1858-1932), a one-time school principal and Cleveland lawyer, was very much a part of this Victorian tradition. (His daughter Helen, incidentally, taught Langston Hughes at Cleveland's Central High School.)

The attempt to deny the importance of this literary tradition cannot disguise the extent of its influence on the folk genre that developed at the end of the 19th century. Nor should this influence be surprising, since the new form could only be developed by cultivated black men and women of letters out of an already existing tradition. Thus, the very people who were responsible for introducing the folk genre into black literature were themselves the products of middle-class upbringing and education. In addition to Chestnutt, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was a college professor and intellectual and James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) was a diplomat and later a college professor. Sterling Brown's father was a distinguished Washington, D.C., minister; Langston Hughes's father was a businessman who disdained his son's literary ambitions. And Zora Neale Hurston's father was a pillar of the black community of Eatonville, Florida.

One way to understand the writers of a later period like the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's is to see them as ideological rebels against an earlier middle-class literary world, to which they themselves had close ties.

Then there is Mr. Kilson's claim that I misrepresent the work of Sterling Brown (1901-89) by failing to note his career as a writer of fiction in the folk genre. But Brown was perhaps best known to an earlier generation of black intellectuals as a distinguished critic whose voluminous reviews of African-American literature appeared in magazines like *Opportunity* and the *Crisis*. (Brown's work has recently been collected by Mark Sanders in *A Son's Return*, Northeastern University Press.)

Finally, there is the question of the extent to which the black folk tradition has been misrepresented by black intellectuals for their own ideological purposes. As I noted in my review, black literature received an enormous push from the broad-based 20th-century democratization of education and the ensuing social mobility of the African-American bourgeoisie. In this context, the elevation of the folk genre to central status speaks quite cogently to the tensions of black social mobility. But the fact remains that the folk genre is far from being the only, or even the major, current of African-American literature; nor, as the ideologues would have it, does it represent the totality of the black experience in America.

Hitler and the Germans

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of *Explaining Hitler* by Ron Rosenbaum [Books in Review, September], Gabriel Schoenfeld writes that the "centrality of large social forces" discussed in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* grants "indirect absolution" to Hitler and the Germans "for the crime of genocide." This is quite a leap of interpretation. Whether one agrees with Goldhagen's argument or not, "the centrality of large social forces" does not erase the reality that such forces are composed of millions of personal choices and decisions arrived at and acted upon by individuals in a multiplicity of contexts.

Mr. Schoenfeld takes an even greater leap when he writes that "Goldhagen is hardly the only student of the Holocaust to exculpate Hitler, or the Germans, in some fashion or other." After again labeling Goldhagen, in effect, an apologist for the perpetrators of the Holocaust, he uses this phraseology to segue into a discussion of the anti-Semite and Nazi-lover David Irving and the self-hating Jew George Steiner—referring to them all as "twisted examples" of Holocaust-explainers. This failure to differentiate between a scholar with a controversial thesis and two deeply flawed individuals purveying moral trash reveals either that Mr. Schoenfeld bears a personal animus toward Goldhagen or that he suffers from a hideously deficient discriminatory function.

SIDNEY HELFANT
Kingsborough Community College
Brooklyn, New York

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD writes:

Sidney Helfant is certainly correct that "large social forces" are composed of "millions of personal choices and decisions," but this obvious observation hardly begins to resolve the thorny problem of affixing historical responsibility. After all, in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's schema, ordinary Germans were in the grip of anti-Semitic "fantasies" so intense that they not only lacked compunctions about murdering innocent men, women, and children but believed instead that they were "ideological warriors" carrying out "heroic deeds." It is hardly a leap, or even much of a step, to argue, as Ron Rosenbaum does in his book, that the attribution to the Germans of such powerful delusions has the effect of diminishing their responsibility for their crimes on grounds of mass insanity, thereby offering them an indirect form of absolution.

With respect to the "personal animus" or the "hideously deficient discriminatory function" that has allegedly led me to lump Goldhagen together with David Irving and George Steiner, all I can say is that Mr. Helfant has worked himself into a lather without cause. I was fairly clear in distinguishing the legitimate scholar Goldhagen from the other two truly "grotesque" cases, though evidently not clear enough

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for a reader unaccountably determined to grind an ax.

Meyer Schapiro

TO THE EDITOR:

In my estimation, Steven C. Munson's review of Meyer Schapiro's posthumous work, *Impressionism: Reflections and Perception* [Books in Review, August], is in accord with the unfolding aura of Meyer Schapiro. Perhaps because he is a painter, Mr. Munson's writing is close to Schapiro's sensibility (I recall Schapiro remarking, "I always draw before I write"). I am sorry, however, for one omission: there is no mention in the review of the fine editing of James Thompson of Western Carolina University; nowhere does Thompson come between the reader and Meyer Schapiro.

JAMES ROSEN
The Meyer Schapiro Program
Augusta State University
Augusta, Georgia

George Gershwin

TO THE EDITOR:

I was amazed to find that an article about George Gershwin and the influences on his work ["Gershwin at 100" by Terry Teachout," September] could have left out the fact that Gershwin was also taught by Joseph Schillinger.

JOEL WALDMAN
Palo Alto, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I usually find COMMENTARY reliable and Terry Teachout's insights into the musical scene informative, but I was dismayed by an obvious error in his September article. George Gershwin an old man, a centenarian, a relic of an antique past, gone from us for more than a half-century? Nonsense. Not while the youthful exuberance and *joie de vivre* of his melodies and harmonies sparkle so freshly and irresistibly that they could have been minted this morning.

John O'Hara was absolutely right when, on hearing the report of Gershwin's death, he said, "I don't have to believe it if I don't want to." Neither do we.

ROSANNE KLASS
New York City

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

Joel Waldman is absolutely right—I should have at least mentioned the fact that George Gershwin studied with Joseph Schillinger, one of the most interesting and least-known figures in American music between the wars. Though Schillinger's "mathematical" approach to theory and composition long ago fell into critical disrepute, at least two famous American musicians, Gershwin and Glenn Miller, seem to have found it creatively stimulating. Presumably some ambitious Gershwin scholar will one day produce a paper about the influence of Schillinger's method on *Porgy and Bess*.

I could not agree more with Rosanne Klass's charming letter, and will take the opportunity to note that anyone seeking further evidence of Gershwin's continuing freshness need only listen to *George Gershwin: The 100th Birthday Celebration* (RCA Victor Red Seal 09026-68931-2). Released too late to figure in my discography, this two-CD set contains superlative performances of *An American in Paris*, the Concerto in F, the Second Rhapsody, and excerpts from *Porgy and Bess* by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony (about whom I hope to have more to say in the future). Judging by this album and the related all-Gershwin concert he gave at Carnegie Hall in September, I feel confident in saying that Thomas is the outstanding Gershwin conductor of our time.

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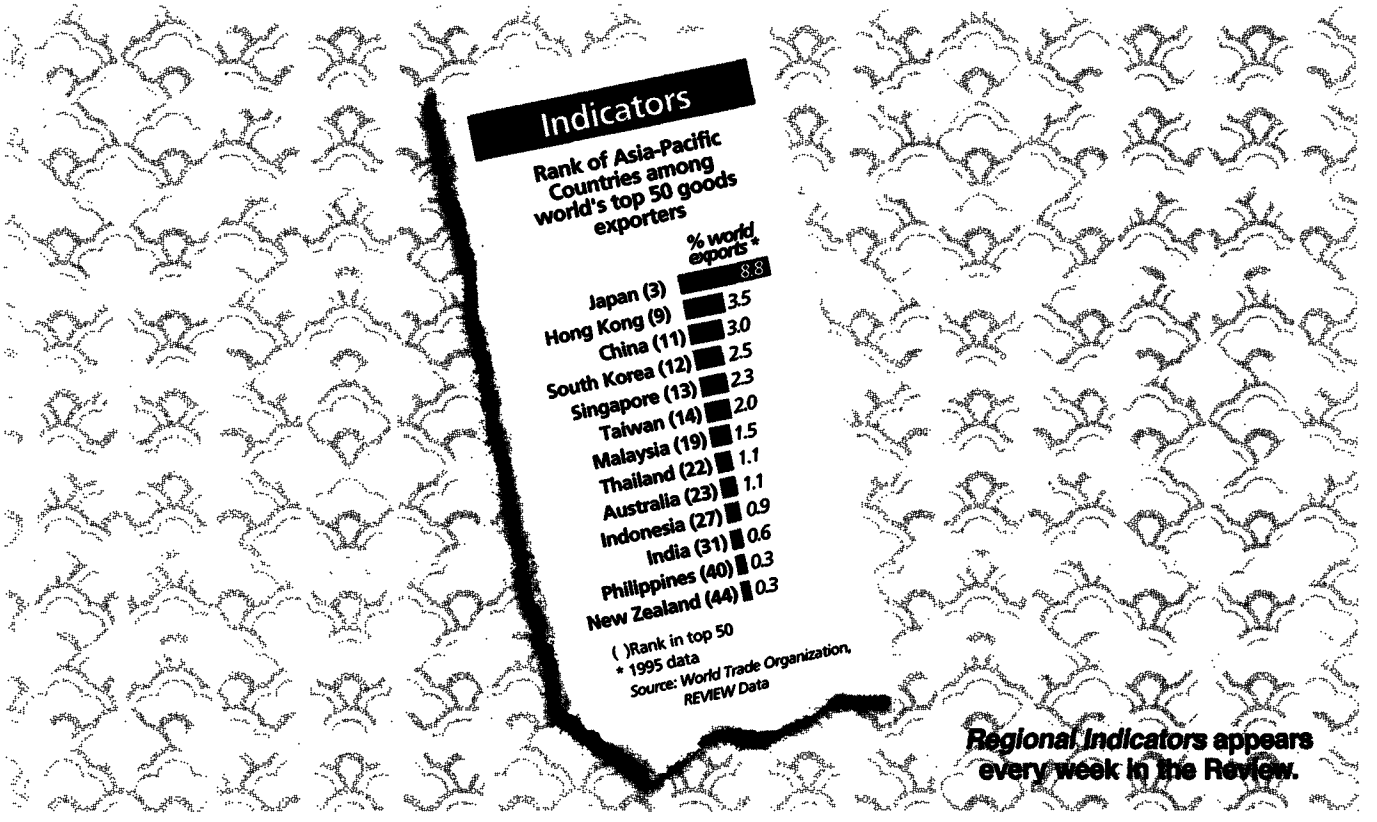

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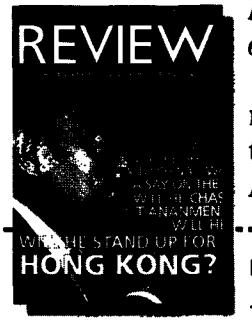

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CONTROVERSY

Does IQ Matter?

Christopher F. Chabris & Critics

HOWARD GARDNER:

Contrary to the implications of Christopher F. Chabris's "IQ Since *The Bell Curve*" [August], sciences—including psychology—operate and progress in more than one way. Mr. Chabris focuses on the study of intelligence as it has been carried out over the past century by psychometricians—psychologists interested in the measurement of abilities and traits. His evidence and conclusions follow from the psychometrician's tools of the trade: paper-and-pencil tests, delivered in settings remote from daily practice (typically classrooms or testing laboratories), often timed, and loaded heavily with items that are linguistic, logical, or spatial in nature. Individuals trained in this tradition—many of whom make a living from administering such batteries of tests—are reluctant to consider alternative definitions or assessments of intellect. Often reviewing the data from a scientifically conservative perspective, they tend to emphasize the unitary (rather than the pluralistic) aspects of intellect, and the hereditary (rather than the environmental) explanations of individual differences in intelligence.

Fortunately, over the last two decades, the study of intelligence has become much more varied in terms of definitions, approaches, sources of data, and tentative conclusions. Mr. Chabris mentions my theory of multiple intelligences, developed over the last twenty years. He does not, however, mention that my theory grew out of an entirely different source of data. Rather than creating and administering short-answer tests, I surveyed evidence from a wide range of sciences. Abilities gained credibility as candidate intelligences to the extent that they fulfilled various criteria: the presence of areas in the brain that serve particular functions and processes; the existence of people, like prodigies or savants, who exhibit particular strengths or weaknesses in different areas; relevant evidence from evolutionary psychology, cross-cultural experiences, and psychological experimentation. My initial list of intelligences included seven: the language, logic, and spatial abilities recognized by other psychologists, and also musical, bodily, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. After a decade of further research in this area, I believe that there is firm evidence for an eighth, or naturalist's, intelligence, and some evidence for a ninth, or existential, intelligence.

From the perspective of most psychometricians, I have committed two cardinal sins. First, I did not define my intelligences on the basis of test correlations, but rather out of a synthesis of information and data gleaned from the biological, cultural, and psychological sciences. This is a perfectly valid scientific approach—it just runs counter to what American psychometricians have done.

My second sin is hesitancy about creating a battery of tests of different intelligences. This is not a hesitation on principle. I am interested in the nature of the different intelligences, and I am curious about the extent to which they do or do not correlate with one another. Contrary to what Mr. Chabris maintains, I have actually been involved in research that has sought to assess the intelligences of young children; three volumes on this research, *Project Spectrum*, will shortly be issued by Teachers' College Press. Nor do I, nor do individ-

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uals associated with me, when asked how abilities in the various intelligences are measured, respond that "we don't measure them," as Mr. Chabris claims. We are, however, hesitant to endorse instruments that we feel are inadequate.

Assessments of multiple intelligences should fulfill two criteria. First, they need to be direct and as natural as possible—the assessment should not occur through a paper-and-pencil instrument. Thus, a good measure of interpersonal intelligence should examine how individuals actually interact with and evaluate one another—not how one answers questions about such encounters. Second, they need to survey an intelligence in some detail. Whether we are dealing with spatial, musical, or interpersonal abilities, each of these has many facets, and we should not be satisfied with a one-shot assessment of a single facet.

Personally, I have seen my theory of multiple intelligences misused by teachers who apply quick-and-dirty assessments and then label children as "spatial but not linguistic" or vice versa. On political grounds, I am disturbed by such maneuvers. However, on scientific grounds, it will certainly be possible some day to assess the various intelligences and to determine the extent of their correlations and also the heritability of each of them.

Graduate School of Education
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

CLAUDE S. FISCHER:

Christopher F. Chabris's defense of Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* reminded me of Senator George Aiken's 1966 proposal on the Vietnam war: "Declare victory and withdraw." Mr. Chabris's declaration of victory on behalf of Herrnstein and Murray includes errors small and large. On the small side—but of personal importance to my colleagues and me—Charles Murray was trained in political science, not in sociology.

On the more substantial side, there is, for example, Mr. Chabris's misrepresentation of the report by the American Psychological Association's special panel on *The Bell Curve*, "Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns," which appeared in the February 1996 issue of the *American Psychologist*. The committee did not "[back] all of the book's main claims," as Mr. Chabris asserts. Despite its strained effort to be fair to all sides, several of the panel's conclusions undercut central assertions in *The Bell Curve*. Here are a few examples:

> • Psychometric intelligence appears as only one of a great many factors that influence social outcomes.
>
> • Intelligence-test scores . . . account for about a quarter of the variance [in school achievement]. They are somewhat lower for job performance, and very low for negatively valued outcomes such as criminality.
>
> • Schooling itself changes mental abilities, including those abilities measured on psychometric tests. This is obvious for tests like the SAT, . . . but it is almost equally true of intelligence tests themselves.
>
> • It is clear . . . that . . . differences [in IQ scores among racial groups]—whatever their origin—are well within the range of effect sizes that can be produced by environmental factors.

And on the theory that black/white differences are due to genetics: "There is not much direct evidence on this point, but what little there is fails to support the genetic hypothesis."

Another example of Mr. Chabris's errors is his treatment of the book I and five other sociologists wrote, *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (Princeton, 1996). Although he credits us with "hard work," he understates our findings. We not only show, with the same survey data Herrnstein and Murray used, that social circumstances outweigh test scores in predicting life outcomes, we also show that the so-called intelligence test used in that survey was basically a measure of school performance (and thus heavily determined by teaching) and that in no way could intelligence explain historical changes in, nor cross-national patterns of, economic inequality. Furthermore, Mr. Chabris implies that there was only one other critical "scientific" response to *The Bell Curve* besides our own. This is incorrect. There are at least two other monograph-length studies that refute *The Bell Curve*—Dickens *et al.*, *Does the Bell Curve Ring True?* (Brookings); and Knapp *et al.*, *The Assault on Equality* (Praeger, 1996)—as well as many scholarly articles that do the same.

Mr. Chabris retreats, finally, to asking how anybody could challenge Herrnstein and Murray's "basic claim . . . that smart people [i.e., high scorers on school achievement tests] do better than dumb people." Well, if that were all *The Bell Curve* was about, then the brouhaha really was a "phony controversy," as Mr. Chabris claims. But this is disingenuous. The reason *The Bell Curve* made a splash lies in its assertions that differences in intelligence explain growing economic inequality—they do not; that differences in intelligence explain racial inequality—they do not; that intelligence, because it is genetic in origin, is largely immutable—it is not; and that, therefore, there is nothing that can or ought to be done to ameliorate inequality—also, as history clearly shows, untrue.

Department of Sociology
University of California
Berkeley, California

JAMES R. FLYNN:

Christopher F. Chabris says much that needs saying. I have little sympathy with those who reject the plausibility of a concept of general intelligence, or deny that IQ often

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measures something that behaves much like it. And I have no sympathy with those who wish to discourage research on intelligence of the kind done by Arthur R. Jensen, and a positive antipathy to those instrumental in suppressing Christopher Brand's book on intelligence. Still, I have two reservations.

First, the "Flynn effect," or massive IQ gains over time, causes more problems for IQ-based theories of intelligence than Mr. Chabris acknowledges. No doubt there have been tremendous environmental changes over the past 150 years. But it is not clear what tremendous change occurred between 1972 and 1982 in Holland to boost IQ scores on Raven's Matrices Test (a good measure of general intelligence, or *g*) the equivalent of eight IQ points. The notion that IQ gains over the last 80 years are intelligence gains would mean that in 1918 a majority of people suffered from mental retardation (see my essay, "IQ Gains Over Time," in *The Rising Curve: Long-Term Gains in IQ and Related Matters*, edited by Ulric Neisser).

Second, Mr. Chabris's moderate account of *The Bell Curve* robs it of much of its dramatic impact. The meritocracy thesis of Herrnstein and Murray says nothing less than this: that every step toward the abolition of privilege and inequality of opportunity takes us toward a frightful semi-caste society—one in which genes for intelligence are so correlated with class that lower-class children have virtually no hope of bettering their lot. That should depress Right and Left alike. I have attempted to show that genes for IQ are no more correlated with class today than they were 50 years ago, and that evolution toward such a society is unlikely rather than certain (see my article, "Group Differences: Is the Good Society Impossible?," *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 1996). *The Bell Curve* posits an America with both a huge and hopeless underclass and an elite class so potent as to constitute a threat to our democracy. How the children of these two classes are to compete on a basis of equality is not explained.

University of Otago
Dunedin, New Zealand

JACK KAPLAN:

The argument that IQ tests are valid measures of intelligence rests ultimately on the mathematically complex subject of statistical factor analysis, and therefore cannot be fully understood by people who lack technical training. But common sense should convince any reasonable person that something is fishy.

A typical intelligence test asks a variety of questions, many of which are of the type one learns to answer in school. For example, if you take a Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale test, probably the leading IQ test currently in use, you will be asked to define words; to answer factual and comprehension questions; and to do simple arithmetic problems.

An old version of the test, no longer in use, includes the following questions: what is the meaning of the word "reluctant"?; name three kinds of blood vessels; why does the state require people to get a license before they get married?; a coat that normally sells for $600 is reduced by 15 percent during a sale—what is the price of the coat?

Maybe I am missing something, but it seems perfectly plain to me that the likelihood of answering such questions correctly is heavily affected by, among other things, the quality and quantity of the education one receives as well as by one's intelligence.

In fact, it seems obvious to me that how well a person does on an IQ test depends on a variety of factors besides intelligence: education, reading habits, experience with and attitudes toward taking tests, upbringing, and mental and physical health, to name a few.

Intelligence is difficult to define precisely, but we can all agree that it refers to intellectual ability as opposed to intellectual achievement. No one, so far as I know, thinks that physical ability can be reliably measured by having people tested on a variety of physical skills—running, jumping, swimming, doing push-ups, etc.—and then doing a factor analysis of the results. Why should intellectual ability be any different?

Count me among those who regard the study of intelligence as more pseudo-science than science.

Department of Mathematics
Quinnipiac College
Hamden, Connecticut

KELLY P. AMBROSE:

Christopher F. Chabris succinctly restates the case that *g*, the general intelligence factor, exists and is measurable, but, like so many who have addressed this topic, he does not appear to appreciate the limited significance of that finding. For perspective, one merely has to turn a few more pages in the same issue to Joseph Epstein's article, "The Old People's Socialist League," in which one finds George Orwell's line that "there are certain things one has to be an intellectual to believe, since no ordinary man could be so stupid."

Mr. Chabris describes the Herrnstein and Murray theory that America is becoming "increasingly meritocratic," and without blinking concurs that this would cause "wealth and other positive social outcomes" to be "distributed more and more according to people's intelligence." The presumption is that intelligence can be the supreme coin of a merit market. Yet nowhere is this so, not even in academia.

In *The Bell Curve*, Murray and Herrnstein, perhaps inspired by some of the recent computer-industry fortunes, proposed that the time has come when high SAT's will be the path to and the justification for earthly power, a new order to be sustained by mating trends. Consider how perfectly this vision conforms to a "revenge-of-the-nerds" scenario, for in it not only do those with pro-

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digious IQ's rate respect, but they get the girls! Will they also be the most popular kids in high school?

Efforts to deny *g* simply enable IQ theorists to put off the day when they must finally answer the question: so what? It must be understood that what is being measured when one measures *g* is a gradation of consciousness, and that human consciousness is a gift of such enormity that any difference between some *g* and a lot of *g* is relatively minor: the "dumb people" Mr. Chabris writes of actually possess a greatness in the scheme of things that the term "dumb people" does not quite capture.

The study of *g* ought never to have as its goal a social, economic, or—God help us!—political exaltation of intelligence. It should, rather, seek to place its abstractions in the real world and to increase the capacity of individuals to wrench, from whatever level of *g* they have, the fullest possible enjoyment of the banquet set before us.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

JEFF HITTENBERGER:

In "IQ Since *The Bell Curve*" Christopher F. Chabris writes:

> The most basic claim put forth by Herrnstein and Murray was that smart people do better than dumb people. What is so troubling about that? We rarely encounter an argument over the fact that beautiful people do better than ugly people, or tall people do better than short ones, though each of these propositions is also true.

What a simple world Mr. Chabris and his heroes inhabit. Just as people can be classified by a unilinear measure of height, so they can be classified by unilinear measures of intelligence and beauty—with the tall, smart, beautiful "doing better" than the poor, short, dumb, and ugly.

Though Mr. Chabris does not mention the word "eugenics," he captures its spirit. He has a very poor knowledge of history if he does not understand the revulsion this kind of argument creates.

Monterey County, California

IAN J. DEARY, PETER G. CARYL, and ELIZABETH J. AUSTIN:

Christopher F. Chabris's well-informed article is in many ways welcome. We believe that it might help in the public understanding of a much misunderstood and maligned area of research and hope that the article will be read widely. For those of us who are researchers in the field, however, Mr. Chabris offers a doleful prediction: though we win all the intellectual battles, we shall lose the war. Why? Because, he suggests, up-and-coming researchers are dissuaded from studying intelligence differences by the bad press the field has received from a series of high-profile attacks, including Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* and the responses to Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*.

But we think the propaganda war on intelligence differences need not be won; in fact, one should not even engage in the contest, for two reasons. First, it takes place outside the realm of scientific discourse; its weapon is rhetoric and its shield is public ignorance. Winning such a war would not equate with being correct, which is all that should matter in science.

Second, within the relevant scientific community, the debate over the importance of traditional-style research into human intelligence differences is nonexistent. The authoritative and disinterested report of the American Psychological Association, "Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns," concluded that: (1) the psychometric structure of intelligence differences attracts broad scientific agreement; (2) intelligence differences are highly stable, moderately heritable, and predictive of important life outcomes; and (3) intelligence differences are beginning to be understood in terms of the brain's biology.

Such a consensus on the facts will go much further in convincing new researchers to work in the area than will locking horns with IQ's detractors by writing impassioned articles in intellectual magazines. Perhaps Mr. Chabris's article is itself a sign of this consensus, since he is an outsider who has been won over to the value of the area after having apprised himself of the facts.

Department of Psychology
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

CHRISTOPHER BRAND:

I was grateful for Christopher F. Chabris's kind reference to what he calls my "worthy" book, *The g Factor: General Intelligence and Its Implications*, and his detailing of its publishing—or should I say de-publishing?—history. The book was first published in the United Kingdom in 1996 and then was withdrawn, as Mr. Chabris puts it,

> after negative media coverage and a frenzy reminiscent of the 1970's. The publisher, Wiley, also cancelled the book's publication in the United States before any copies went on sale. Brand has since been fired from his teaching position at Edinburgh University, and has yet to find another publisher.

In his article, Mr. Chabris asks whether the psychometricians in academia could have done more to make their case better known. The question is a good one, especially since even new books on intelligence by Arthur R. Jensen, Richard Lynn, J. Philippe Rushton, Michael Levin, Gunnar Adler-Karlsson, and the late Hans Eysenck are available mainly from mail-order houses, and for the most part the general public has access to them only via libraries.

The problem has not, in fact, been a lack of publication, even in prestigious journals. Let me give a brief list here: Tom Bouchard's study of intelligence in separated identical twins, finding 75-percent similarity, was published in *Science* in 1990; the

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work of my Edinburgh colleagues and myself on the essential connection of IQ with "mental-intake speed" was put to readers of *Behavioral & Brain Sciences* and the *Lancet*, and to international experts at a conference in Berlin; my evidence that "fast-track learning" works without hindering lower-IQ children appeared in *Intelligence*, as well as in my book; my criticisms of the environmentalist idea that the achievements of geniuses result chiefly from hard work appeared in the British *Journal of Developmental Psychology*.

So the problem is not a scarcity of published material. Rather, it is the case that psychologists are frightened to admit that race differences in IQ are substantially heritable. In the public debates over *The Bell Curve* in the U.S., it is noticeable that psychologists have contributed little.

In recent years anyone who speaks out in the media or in academia against egalitarianism puts his job on the line, as I found out to my cost at Edinburgh University.

My own review of America's leading psychological critics of IQ today will appear shortly in *Personality & Individual Differences*, but Mr. Chabris will find that it makes no difference. The social-science faculties of the English-speaking world have become the parade grounds of neo-Stalinist egalitarians. These desperate environmentalists will not read what COMMENTARY recommends; and they keep discipline in universities by censorship, intimidation, and sacking.

Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

KEVIN KORB:

I want to thank COMMENTARY for publishing the interesting discussion of the IQ debate by Christopher F. Chabris. The article makes a variety of points that need making, particularly concerning how Stephen Jay Gould and others committed to an extreme environmental interpretation of intelligence have managed to smear the scientific study of intelligence with the epithet of racism, and by a remarkable variety of fallacious arguments. I have done my small part to expose the errors in my 1994 article in *Cognition* and am happy to see others joining in.

I would, however, like to take issue with one point put forward by Mr. Chabris. He suggests that there is a strong analogy between the suppression of the science of intelligence by extreme environmentalists and the earlier suppression of behaviorism by cognitive psychologists. I do not believe this analogy has any merit. It is, rather, the behaviorists who have spent much of their energies in this century suppressing the scientific study of cognition, personality, and consciousness. It is only in the current decade, for example, that journals devoted to the serious investigation of consciousness have appeared (e.g., *Consciousness and Cognition* and *Psyche*).

Behaviorists, as Mr. Chabris mentions, responded to Noam Chomsky's 1959 critique of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* by labeling it uninformed and irrelevant. Those behaviorists, however, were wrong. Chomsky's work has led, through extension and reaction, to a rich science of linguistics, while Skinner's work on verbal behavior has led to nothing. This is not due to political suppression but to the paucity of theoretical tools available to behaviorism with which to account for linguistic phenomena, as Chomsky himself detailed in 1959.

Skinner's own reaction to Chomsky was extraordinary. In 1970, he wrote:

> I published *Verbal Behavior* in 1957. In 1958 I received a 55-page typewritten review by someone I had never heard of named Noam Chomsky. I read half a dozen pages, saw that it missed the point of my book, and went no further.

Skinner had neither the wit nor the integrity to confront his critics squarely. It would be good to hear that today's environmentalists, like Gould, were different, but I doubt that they are; to take just one example, Gould has never responded, either publicly or privately, to my critique of his work.

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FRANCES H. RAUSCHER:

After reading Christopher F. Chabris's article, I am compelled to comment on his discussion of the so-called "Mozart effect" and on some popular misconceptions about it. The "Mozart effect" is a term coined by the media to refer to the studies by Gordon Shaw and myself on the enhancement of spatial-temporal performance after listening to music.

First, let me note that listening to ten minutes of a Mozart sonata is not going to make one smarter, thereby doing, as some have claimed, "in ten minutes what years of intensive educational interventions often fail to accomplish." Our studies with undergraduates found a short-term (10-15 minute) improvement in spatial-temporal performance, after exposure to complex music, compared with listening to minimalist music, relaxation instructions, British trance music, or an audiotaped story, or with performing the tests in silence. Short-term memory, as well as other areas of spatial reasoning, was not affected. This work has been replicated in other laboratories.

Second, my testimony before a congressional committee that Mr. Chabris mentions was not in response to these Mozart studies. I testified about the benefits of including music in the core curriculum, based on our (and others') studies with preschoolers and kindergartners in which we found long-term improvement in spatial-temporal abilities after music *instruction*, not simply *listening* to music.

The human brain is extremely

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plastic in the early years, with new neural connections being made very rapidly, partly as a function of experience and learning. While *listening* to music may influence task performance by inducing some sort of neural priming, neuroanatomical changes as a function of *active involvement* in music may account for the enhancements found in children. In other words, music involvement may be an experience that influences neural connections that are also relevant to spatial-temporal abilities. Similar effects of this type of influence on the adult brain are not likely to be found. We are currently performing studies with rats to help determine the possible neurophysiological changes brought about by musical enrichment.

All this suggests that the human brain has a remarkable capacity to change; it is not a static entity, and an individual's capacities are not fixed at birth. While one's genetic code may determine one's potential intelligence, I believe that early experience determines whether that potential will be reached. All told, the relative contributions of nature and nurture are not yet known.

Department of Psychology
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KENNETH M. STEELE:

In Christopher F. Chabris's article, which I read with interest, I noted his account of the Mozart effect, in which he mentions an experiment of mine. His description, however, misses one point that is related to the general issues raised in the article.

My experiment used a "backward-digit-span" task, which means that the subject is given a sequence of digits (e.g., 4-3-1) and asked to report them back in reverse sequence (1-3-4). This simple task occupies a central point in the controversies about intelligence. Arthur R. Jensen began his work with the assumption that differences in school performance were explained by cultural differences, and he chose the digit-span task as a culturally-neutral measure of intellectual performance. It was persistent group differences in performance with the backward-digit-span task that led him to his current views. At present, many researchers (like Jensen) view backward-digit-span performance as a measure of *g*. For an appreciation of both the nature and difficulty of the task, a reader could ask a friend to recite the bar-code number from a magazine and then the reader could repeat the sequence backward.

Mr. Chabris's history of the Mozart effect, in which he details the problems with the original short article in *Nature* by Frances H. Rauscher and Gordon Shaw, is accurate. But short reports in *Nature* are supposed to be followed up by more detailed studies in specialized journals; this has not happened. Instead, the authors published a follow-up report in *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, which, as Mr. Chabris notes, is a "low-prestige [journal] that many psychologists never read."

In *Nature*, Rauscher and Shaw reported that they had combined the performance from three different tests because performance among tasks was well-correlated. In their article in *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, however, they show the uncombined results from that experiment and indicate that the effect occurred with only *one* of these tasks. This is an attempt to account for the failure of other researchers to replicate their original experiment. But in fact the two reports of the same experiment contradict each other.

Mr. Chabris further suggests that an account of the failure to replicate the Mozart effect will never appear in a prestigious journal of psychology. In this he may be correct. Recently a paper of mine on a Mozart-effect experiment was rejected by a prestigious journal, with an explanation similar to that of some colleagues of mine who told me that following up on a bogus study was a waste of time.

Let me suggest here that there are two current disciplines of psychology: academic and popular. One is found in university libraries and the other is found in the chain bookstores. Academic psychologists are very skeptical of the Mozart effect, and for good reason. But it is a loss to the commonweal when they refrain from analyzing the claims of popular psychology, thus allowing it to control public policy.

Department of Psychology
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MYRON COPLAN
and ROGER D. MASTERS:

Christopher F. Chabris is correct in stating that "many more phony controversies lie ahead" in the nature/nurture dispute. Neither side is entirely right or entirely wrong. We all know that a tall boy has to have tall genes, a good diet, sunshine, and plenty of practice to get to be a good, tall basketball player. Who doubts that alcohol in the blood of a pregnant woman raises the risk of bearing a neurologically impaired child?

Nurture advocates deny the demonstrated facts of behavior genetics, but the nature side forgets that even identical twins often differ due to subtly different in-utero environments. But some of the most important factors have been generally ignored by academics on both sides of the controversy.

Lead and manganese are neurotoxins that influence brain development. These heavy metals damage brain structures, interfere with normal neurotransmitters, and reduce cognitive competence and impulse control. Taking over twenty conventional factors into consideration, industrial pollution is associated with significantly higher rates of criminal violence (see our article, "Environmental Pollution, Neurotoxicity, and Violence," in *Environmental Toxicology*, edited by J. Rose, 1998).

More recently, in a study we conducted of all communities in Mas-

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sachusetts, we discovered that the use of silicofluorides in water treatment increases the lead in children's blood and, as a consequence, increases rates of violent crime. In general, where silicofluorides are used, we find that crime rates are doubled.

There is no end to the nature/nurture issues these considerations invoke. Here is an example. Calcium, which is released from a pregnant woman's bones, is required for fetal neural and bone development. Exposure to lead in the environment (paint dust, water from lead plumbing, soil) raises the potential of lead entering the gastrointestinal tract, from which it can cross into the bloodstream. Once in the blood, especially if the diet is low in calcium, iron, and other essential minerals, lead is absorbed in the bones and in the developing brain. Little wonder that studies have consistently shown that lead or manganese absorption is associated with attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, and lower IQ.

These effects are worse for blacks, who are six times as likely as whites to have levels of lead in their blood over 25 µg/dL. Not surprisingly, according to national Health and Nutrition Evaluation Surveys, blacks' intake of calcium is only about three-quarters that of whites. But, as a study in Baltimore and Philadelphia sponsored by the Abell Foundation shows, providing school breakfasts has remarkable effects in improving students' performance and behavior. No wonder that the most effective part of Head Start programs (to the chagrin of some ideologues) was probably its nutritional component.

We cannot change genes (yet). And, as the failures of the last generation have shown, it is just as hard to change schools and teachers, not to mention the entire socioeconomic system of the United States. But we did get lead out of gasoline, and a good school breakfast is relatively cheap and effective to deliver to the poor. Maybe it will be easier to clean up the water supplied to our inner cities than to clarify the intellectual debates that professors love so much.

Intellequity Technology Services
Natick, Massachusetts

Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire

RICHARD J. MCNALLY:

Christopher F. Chabris's excellent article provides an informative analysis of post-*Bell Curve* scholarship on cognitive ability. Two issues warrant further comment. First, he mentions a seminar in the Harvard psychology department during which a member of Howard Gardner's research team discussed educational applications of the theory of multiple intelligences. When I asked the speaker how she and her colleagues measured the different intelligences, I was startled when she replied that they do not measure them. Because measurement is integral to psychology, it would seem desirable to develop reliable and valid quantitative indices of the distinct intelligences postulated by this interesting theory.

Second, cognitive ability is related to certain mental disorders as well as to various social problems. Intrigued by Herrnstein and Murray's work, my colleagues and I tested whether cognitive ability predicts the severity of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in Vietnam combat veterans (see our papers in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1998, and the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1995). After controlling statistically for the extent of combat exposure, we found that the lower a veteran's pre-combat IQ score, the more severe were his PTSD symptoms today. Thus, higher cognitive ability may protect against the development of chronic PTSD symptoms following exposure to horrific events.

Department of Psychology
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JOHN B. CARROLL:

It was gratifying to see the article by Christopher F. Chabris supporting the idea that there are indeed important differences among people in IQ or general intelligence, with which I heartily agree. In the article, Mr. Chabris mentions my book *Human Cognitive Abilities* (1993) and notes that it "offers the most extensive factor-analysis of mental tests." But I regret that he was not able to include a full discussion of my three-level theory that includes not only general intelligence at the apex of a hierarchy but also a set of broad abilities like general reasoning and spatial ability at a second-order level, and a set of perhaps 50 or 60 special abilities, like native-language vocabulary and even "absolute pitch" possessed by some musicians and others. Thus, my theory straddles the two sides of the argument about whether there is only one general intellectual ability or a multiplicity of abilities.

Mr. Chabris rightly notes that Stephen Jay Gould's critique of general intelligence "has been widely accepted." But by whom and on what basis? It has long irked me that so many otherwise reputable social scientists subscribe to Gould's statements about mental abilities. In his writings, Gould has a wondrous way of sounding like a scientist who has carefully studied factor analysis—the statistical procedures used to identify varieties of individual differences—and has discovered certain fatal flaws in it. But he is wrong, both in his claim that the notion of general intelligence cannot be supported by factor analysis and in his belief that factor analysis can say something about the hereditary basis of mental ability (see my article in the January-February 1995 issue of *Intelligence*).

Quite apart from Gould's views, I have also been bothered by the reluctance of many social scientists and others to accept the idea—or in fact the scientific finding—that

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variations in people's mental abilities may at least be partly founded on genetics. I find it odd that while most people acknowledge the partially genetic basis for many physical diseases and psychological disorders, they regard it as distasteful and unacceptable to think about cognitive ability in terms of genes. We can regret that genes affect many aspects of our lives, but it is more rational to accept this fact and think about ways of helping people (children and adults) to overcome the limitations that may be imposed on them by adverse genes.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ:

Christopher F. Chabris's article is both informative and courageous. I do not write to take issue with its substance but simply to make a small but important correction: Hans Eysenck's book, *Intelligence*, is not a posthumous volume, as Mr. Chabris says, but one that was completed in its entirety before his death. While this may appear as nitpicking, there is a tendency to treat posthumous work as a lesser, even inauthentic, effort. Having sat with Eysenck through the final stages of manuscript preparation, I can assure Mr. Chabris and COMMENTARY readers that *Intelligence* is not only "accessible and entertaining" but entirely authentic.

Transaction Publishers
Rutgers University
Piscataway, New Jersey

MALCOLM JAMES REE:

"IQ Since *The Bell Curve*" makes several significant points about the importance of general intelligence. If anything, Christopher F. Chabris errs on the side of not making the case strongly enough. Empirical studies by numerous researchers have shown intelligence to be the most influential factor in occupational performance in all jobs and as having significant influence on most other areas of life. Intelligence has been shown to be positively related, among other things, to eminence, creativity, moral reasoning, income, motivation, practical knowledge, and motor skills. By contrast, an equally broad category that includes such things as impulsivity, truancy, accident-proneness, racial prejudice, and authoritarianism has been found to have a negative correlation with intelligence.

The critics of intelligence should conduct empirical studies rather than just reporting anecdotes and offering examples. Finally, although this is a highly technical issue, it should be noted that general intelligence is the factor that contributes the most to verbal, spatial, and mathematical ability.

Department of Psychology
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NEIL SEEMAN:

I am greatly indebted to Christopher F. Chabris for injecting considerable equanimity and good sense into the ideologically polarized debate over the measurability of human intelligence. Since the publication of *The Bell Curve*, detractors of this ground-breaking work have been motivated by the most vicious manifestations of academic jealousy and, as Mr. Chabris tells us, shocking scientific disingenuousness.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

ARTHUR R. JENSEN:

Christopher F. Chabris displays a keen perception of the current state of affairs related to *The Bell Curve* and the so-called "IQ controversy." Among the article's remarkable features is the fact that it provides the first public recognition that, with notable exceptions, the community of specialists in psychometrics has been shamefully negligent in defending its science and what it knows to be true about the *g* factor, or general intelligence, the existence of which is firmly established by massive evidence and is contradicted by virtually none. The only important direction now left for further research on the nature of *g* is to go directly into the human brain itself. Research has already revealed a number of anatomical and physiological brain correlates of psychometric *g*. This evidence, in addition to the high heritability of *g*, suggests it is a biological as well as a psychological phenomenon.

Therefore, it is probably puzzling to the general reader that Mr. Chabris, who is working in cognitive neuroscience, should tell us that his friends were surprised by his writing an article on intelligence. This is not surprising, considering how *g* has been generally ignored by cognitive neuroscientists.

Entirely aside from the politically-correct prejudice that surrounds research on intelligence, there is another reason why researchers in cognitive neuroscience have generally paid so little attention to the *g* factor: the failure to recognize the important distinction between the essential design features of the brain (the main interest of neuroscientists), which show distinct modules and specific localization of functions for various distinct cognitive functions, on the one hand, and individual differences in the speed and efficiency with which these functions operate (the main interest of psychometricians and differential psychologists), on the other. But I would argue that both of these facets are proper subject matter for brain research. I suggest as a heuristic hypothesis that the design features of the brain—its neural structures and functions—that are necessary for the many distinct processes that enter into information-processing, or intelligence (such as attention, perception, discrimination, generalization, learning, memory, language, thinking, problem-solving, and the like) are essentially the same for all biologically normal Homo sapiens, i.e., those free of chromosomal and major gene anomalies or brain damage.

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Correlated individual differences in the functioning of these various information processes are a result of other quantitative biochemical and physiological conditions in the brain, most of them highly heritable, that are separate from the brain's essential design features, or "hard-wiring," but are, as it were, superimposed on all of them in common, and affect the overall speed and efficiency of their functioning.

A methodology for discovering these physical conditions responsible for the existence of psychometric *g* is explained in my recent book, *The g Factor*, along with examples of individual variation in the several different quantitative anatomical and physiological conditions that are found to cause various distinct cognitive functions to be correlated and hence to result in the wide range of individual differences in general ability.

Professor Emeritus
Educational Psychology
University of California
Berkeley, California

CHARLES MURRAY:

Christopher F. Chabris's pessimism about IQ's future may easily be right, but here is an alternative scenario. The key is his point that "people often react most defensively when challenged . . . on beliefs they wish were true but suspect at some level to be false." I think the level in question is shifting closer and closer to the surface. The science of the IQ controversy is too one-sided for serious scholars to be unshaken by it, no matter how passionate their ideological preferences. And there is the matter of everyday experience: can anyone who spends his life in one of America's leading universities doubt that Richard J. Herrnstein and I were correct about cognitive stratification?

Now assume—and it is a high-probability assumption—that in the next two decades behavioral genetics comes down on the side of the classic psychometric view of intelligence. Arguments that IQ is not substantially heritable disappear. Arguments that *g* is a statistical artifact disappear. A hodge-podge of politically-correct allegations about IQ are discredited. Add this kind of evidence to the cognitive dissonance that already nags at many of the IQ critics, and you have the stuff of an explosion in the received wisdom about intelligence.

Ironically, the genetic story will not have much effect on our state of knowledge about the relationship of IQ to social and economic outcomes—the topic of *The Bell Curve*. But the psychological effect of the genetic story on members of the academy is likely to be profound. I confess to a hankering to be around to see it.

Burkittsville, Maryland

Christopher F. Chabris

I AM gratified by the range of responses that "IQ Since *The Bell Curve*" stimulated, and I thank everyone who wrote. I am especially pleased with the correspondence that avoids rehashing past debates and instead discusses methods and trends that may characterize the future of intelligence research. I will say more about these matters later on, but let me begin by addressing the mistakes I have been accused of making.

Despite Howard Gardner's protestation that none of his associates would deny measuring the "multiple intelligences" his theory proposes, one of his co-authors in fact made this denial in my presence, as Richard J. McNally corroborates. Mr. Gardner's influential theory has often been interpreted as claiming that seven or, we now learn, eight or nine domains of basic cognitive abilities are independent of one another in all respects, and that there is thus no such thing as general intelligence. Since this hypothesis contradicts mainstream theory so directly, it cries out to be tested. Mr. Gardner's letter recognizes that need, and it is good to hear that his new research will be published "shortly." But the fact that, fifteen years after the theory itself appeared, we have yet to see the empirical support for it illustrates more plainly than any seminar discussion the reluctance of multiple-intelligence advocates to put their ideas to the test.

In any event, I am troubled by the path suggested by Mr. Gardner's criteria for fair assessments of multiple intelligences. Each ability, he says, has "many facets," all of which need more than a "one-shot assessment" before an overall assessment can be arrived at. But do these facets themselves have facets, just as intelligence itself has seven or more facets? If too many facets of too many things must be measured too many times (per person!), the whole process becomes unworkable, and the theory behind it ultimately loses its scientific value for lack of testability. True, sciences operate and progress in many ways; but the most important way is by comparing theoretical predictions with empirical facts.

As Claude S. Fischer and others have pointed out, Charles Murray received his doctorate in political science, not in sociology as I implied, and I apologize to all concerned. More pertinently, Mr. Fischer takes me to task for neglecting two anti-*Bell Curve* works. Since one has not yet been published and an advance copy was not forthcoming from its publisher, I can comment only on *The Assault on Equality*. In its outlook and in the thrust of its analysis, it is similar to Mr. Fischer's own book; like the final paragraph of Mr. Fischer's letter, it attempts to refute an exaggerated form of almost every assertion of *The Bell Curve*, though

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in a more sarcastic, denigrating tone and with decidedly less careful attention to accuracy. It should be read by anyone who needs an extended example of the "paroxysms of denial" (the phrase is Arthur R. Jensen's) with which some critics have responded to IQ research.

In his letter, Mr. Fischer claims that I misrepresented the American Psychological Association's post-*Bell Curve* report on intelligence. I am happy that he has chosen the APA report as his battleground since, as Ian J. Deary and his colleagues relate, it does indeed endorse the scientific concept of general intelligence and the major methods used to study it. Mr. Fischer, by contrast, recites several quotations from the report that he believes "undercut central assertions" of Herrnstein and Murray.

Let me reply by saying that, first, it is true that "intelligence appears as only one of a great many factors that influence social outcomes," and certainly this is a "main claim." But, just as certainly, it does not contradict *The Bell Curve*, which did not, as Mr. Fischer seems to imply, say that intelligence was the *only* predictor of social outcomes. A look at its many graphs comparing the effects of intelligence and socioeconomic status shows that each has an effect, the issue being which effect is larger.

Second, it is also true that little of the total variation in social outcomes is accounted for by variation in intelligence. Again, however, far from contradicting *The Bell Curve*, this part of the APA report actually cites the book's own results in presenting its conclusions. Mr. Fischer implies that if a predictor—in this case, intelligence—accounts for only a "small" proportion of the variation in an outcome (say, less than one quarter), it must not be very important. But what is a reasonable baseline against which to compare the effect of intelligence? Or, to put it another way, how large an effect should surprise us?

Given the myriad factors and circumstances that influence people's lives over the course of decades, it is remarkable that scores on a single test should explain even 5 percent of their differences in job performance or criminal behavior, not to mention the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder studied by Richard J. McNally or the many qualities listed by Malcolm James Ree. An effect much smaller than 5 percent was considered large enough to interrupt a major biomedical study on the grounds that it would be unethical to continue denying to anyone the "tiny" benefit from the medication involved; the benefit was a reduction in heart-attack risk and fatality, and the medication was aspirin.

Mr. Fischer's other points are similarly problematic. He hears *The Bell Curve* saying what he wants to hear, not what it actually says, and so he mistakenly hears the APA report contradicting it. His own response, one might say, like that of many others, has been to "declare victory and withdraw."

JAMES R. FLYNN, who noticed the Flynn effect but did not coin the term—in fact, Herrnstein and Murray coined it in *The Bell Curve*—asks whether, given the large gains in IQ test scores over the past 80 years, we would consider most adults of the World War I era to be mentally retarded by today's standards. It is a better question than he seems to think. An average 1918 adult might indeed score very low on one of today's IQ tests; confronted via time-travel with today's culture and technology, that same adult might be so bewildered and confused that full adjustment could never occur. But in any case, such rhetorical arguments and thought-exercises cannot, by themselves, yield an explanation of what has and has not changed about human cognition and the environments in which it occurs, and we need such an explanation before we can understand the meaning of Mr. Flynn's "effect."

JACK KAPLAN argues that intelligence tests do not measure intelligence because individuals with more or better education will usually do better at answering the questions. (The same argument is made by Mr. Fischer and his colleagues with reference to the particular test used in Herrnstein and Murray's analyses.) But this assumes, ironically enough, that intelligence is a trait that cannot be affected by education. If we follow Mr. Kaplan's logic to its conclusion, we shall soon be holding that intelligence must be determined completely by genetic and prenatal factors—something it is safe to presume he does not believe.

Psychometric conceptions of intelligence commonly give roles to both "fluid" intelligence, loosely corresponding to the ability to process information in novel ways, and "crystallized" intelligence, or the stored knowledge and methods that assist in problem-solving. Both are associated with general intelligence, but they influence one another as well, and develop differently across an individual's life span. Perhaps Mr. Kaplan considers only fluid intelligence to be "true" intelligence, but it is not possible to separate "intellectual ability" completely from "intellectual achievement." Even if we considered only measures of fluid intelligence as predictors of job performance and other outcomes, the results would probably not differ greatly, since fluid intelligence is the strongest component of general intelligence.

KELLY P. AMBROSE stresses the importance in life and in society of factors other than intelligence. The point is undeniable, and it is not denied by psychometric theorists, who are fully aware that whatever intelligence does not predict must be explained by all sorts of other traits and contexts and their interactions, as well as by an almost infinite succession of virtually random idiosyncratic circumstances that are beyond

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analysis. This does not mitigate the fact that intelligence is often the single best predictor of who will succeed or fail in a given occupation or situation.

BECAUSE I noted that people with certain characteristics do better than people without them, Jeff Hittenberger accuses me of eugenicism. It is hard to imagine a more fallacious inference, but people who simply state empirical facts are accused all the time of harboring noxious and veiled policy goals. Indeed, this subtle form of guilt by association can even transcend generations. Thus, a recent letter to the *New York Times* from one Stephanie Olson claimed that "the National Socialist party in Germany drew upon the work of American scientists like . . . Dr. Arthur Jensen, who argued for the genetic inferiority of minorities." As it happens, Jensen was ten years old when Hitler came to power.

Mr. Hittenberger might profit from rereading the paragraph in my original article that followed the one he quotes. As I wrote there, "whenever intelligence is said, 'race' is heard; whenever race is said, 'genetics' is heard; and whenever genetics is said, 'inferiority' is heard—even though these issues are not necessarily connected in any way." To this I can now add, regrettably, that whenever the subject of human differences is addressed, "eugenics" will be cried in reply.

IAN J. DEARY and Christopher Brand, though they inhabit the same city, might as well live on different planets. Mr. Brand's planet, unfortunately, has a much less hospitable climate. Since his book was "de-published" and he was fired from the faculty of the University of Edinburgh, he has been merely waiting—literally, on tables. Mr. Deary is rather more fortunate: in *his* world of science, where Mr. Brand used to live and where he did important work relating mental-processing speed and other correlates to *g*, the enterprise of intelligence research continues apace.

ARTHUR R. JENSEN and Charles Murray ask what will happen next in this field, but offer different answers. Lamenting the neglect of individual differences by cognitive neuroscientists, Mr. Jensen suggests that they are confused about the distinction between those mechanisms of the brain that implement particular functions common to all human beings and those properties that cut across such "modules" and give rise to overall speed and efficiency, or general ability. It is true that cognitive neuroscientists are more interested in comparing people with monkeys and rats than with other people, but I believe this tendency owes more to a simple lack of interest than to any misunderstanding on their part.

Cognitive neuroscientists are in fact uniquely equipped to write a crucial chapter in the behavioral-genetic story of intelligence. Genes are linked to behavior by the brain, where the genes are expressed and the behavior is originated. I alluded in my original article to the work of an international research team led by Robert Plomin of the Institute of Psychiatry in London, which recently discovered that one variant of a specific gene is found more frequently in high-IQ children than in average-IQ children. Thanks to the Human Genome Project, we also know that this same gene codes for a protein known as "insulin-like growth factor-2 receptor." What we do not yet know is how this protein is involved in the sequence of events that leads to mental functioning—in particular, which areas or properties of the brain are influenced by the protein, how and when it influences them, and how they in turn influence cognition.

Discovering such multilevel chains of causation is beyond psychometrics, but it is the defining goal of cognitive neuroscience. Until we do discover them, the relationship between genetics and behavior will remain as mysterious as the eerie similarities between identical twins that are traditionally used to document it.

Ironically, it may turn out that to develop a cognitive understanding of the genetics of intelligence, neuroscientists will depend on the very individual differences they have heretofore ignored. As the Plomin group's research shows, linking specific genes to specific brain functions requires finding people who differ in each and measuring the associations among those differences. A reconciliation of the psychometric and cognitive approaches to intelligence would be a wonderful legacy of the welcome entry of genetics into psychology.

IN "IQ Since *The Bell Curve*," I predicted more phony controversies even as our understanding of human cognitive abilities expands in the coming years. Charles Murray disagrees, forecasting a long-awaited and sudden acceptance by academics and the public of the overwhelming evidence for the reality and heritability of intelligence. Such an outcome would, in a sense, vindicate Richard J. Herrnstein and himself, and we can only hope things turn out that way.

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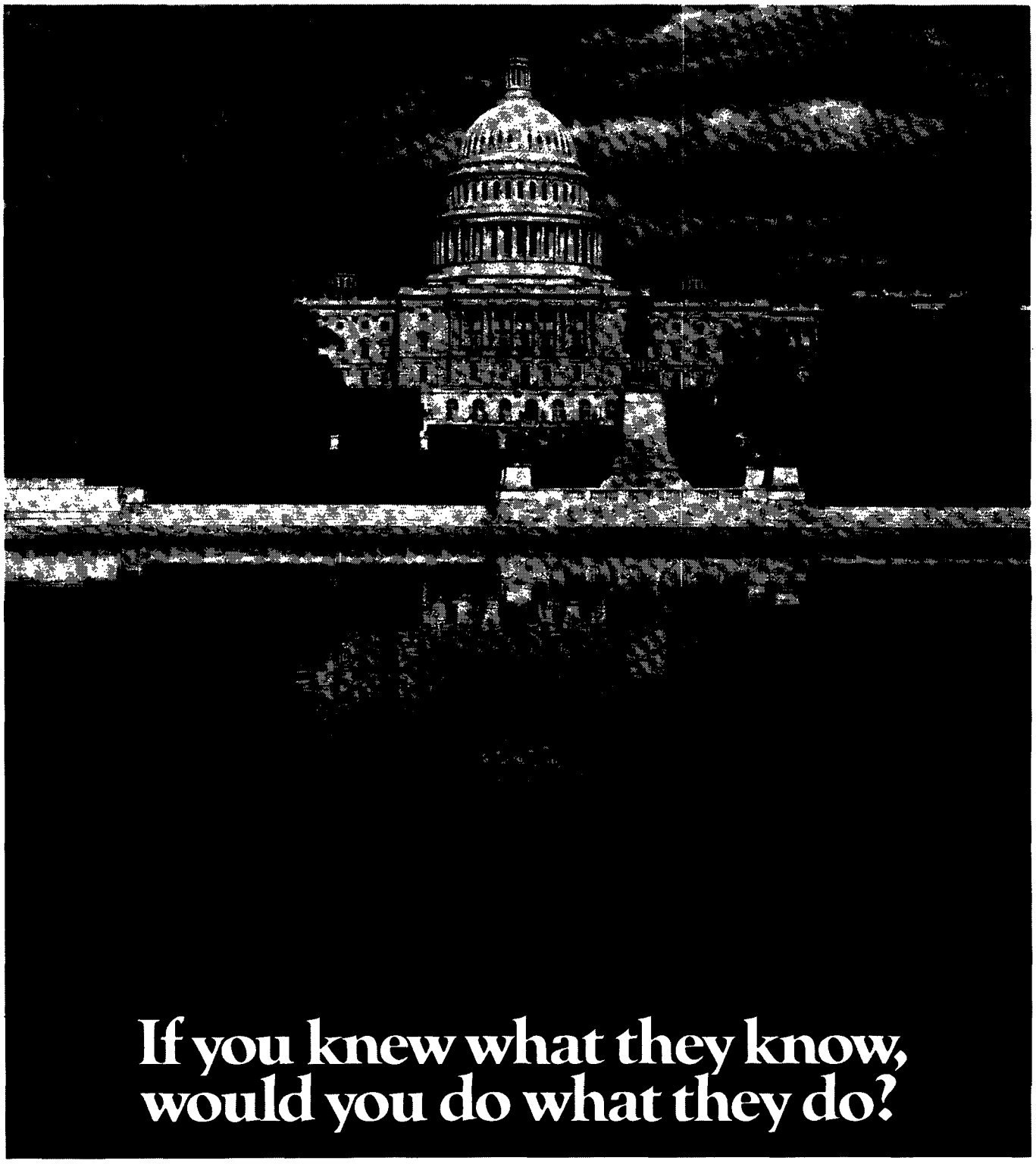

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Commentary
November 1998

The Real "New Middle East"

Daniel Pipes

After the fall of the Soviet Union, and still more so after the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993, many confident predictions were made that we were on the brink of a "new Middle East," one in which age-old animosities were inexorably yielding to political reconciliation, the forces of reaction and disorder were being beaten back, and a new dawn of economic, social, and cultural friendship was at hand. That none of this has come to pass should by now be obvious to anyone with eyes to see.

There *is* a new Middle East. Only, it is not the one envisioned by the post-cold-war, post-Oslo utopians. It is far more complicated than that, and far more perilous. To begin to get a flavor of this new Middle East, one could do worse than take a look at the unassuming island of Cyprus.

Divided between Greek and Turkish sectors and long an area of ethnic strife, Cyprus is seething again—but in a wholly novel way. If all goes as scheduled, Russian ships will begin delivering $400-million worth of advanced surface-to-air missiles, SAM-300's, to Greek Cyprus in late November. Greek Cypriots insist they must have this powerful weapon to balance Turkish air superiority over the island. But the mainland Turkish government in Ankara, warning that the presence of these missiles will pose a danger to flights over Turkey itself, has vowed to prevent their deployment by any means necessary, including force. In turn, Athens has warned that if the Turks carry out their threat to destroy the missiles, it will come to the aid of the Greek Cypriots in accordance with the terms of their mutual-defense treaty.

This is not just another escalation in the squabbles that have bedeviled Cyprus since its independence from Great Britain in 1960, and that have barely affected the region as a whole. Here is why: the Turkish foreign minister has asked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel for help in preventing the missiles from reaching Greek Cyprus. Although the Israelis explicitly deny any intention of becoming involved, the Greek Cypriot government is worried enough to have urged the Russians, who plan to sell it the missiles, to exert counterpressure on Israel to stay out. In the meantime, Greece itself, far from standing passively by, has held a military exercise near Turkey and taken steps to solidify its ties not only with Russia but with such disparate and seemingly unrelated countries as Syria, Armenia, and Iran. As for the Turks, they have been using the time before November to augment their military ties with Israel as well as with Jordan, and to move troops to the Syrian border for a possible confrontation with Damascus.

In short, the ripples of this particular crisis already extend far beyond the island of Cyprus. However unlikely the prospect may seem, it is not

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out of the question that, should Moscow make the SAM-300 deliveries, a general war could break out in the Levant.

What is going on here? Greece, a member both of NATO and of the European Union, has a democratic government and a modern economy; at this moment in history, its major challenge is meeting the criteria needed to take full part in the European monetary union. What, then, is it doing allying itself with the likes of Syria and Iran, two of the world's cruelest, most radical, and most anti-Western regimes? Why, for that matter, is Greece also backing the PKK (Kurdistan Workers party), the fanatical leftist Kurdish movement that since 1984 has engaged in one of the most aggressive terrorist campaigns anywhere, leading to an estimated 30,000 deaths in Turkey; and why, in April 1997, did over one-third of Greek parliamentarians express "solidarity with the martyred people of Kurdistan" and invite the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, to visit Athens?

The short answer is that the Greeks hate and fear Turks. And so, in the time-honored fashion of the Middle East, they seek to befriend other enemies of Turkey, whoever they may be and however vicious they may be. Acting on a similar logic, Turkey, also a member of NATO and a country with a democratic government, has turned to Israel and Jordan, the other states in the Middle East with a conspicuously pro-American outlook.

But there is a longer answer as well. In a world no longer dominated by the rivalry of the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the Middle East is rapidly sorting itself into two new regional power blocs. The formation of these blocs, or teams, is a development with profound implications not only for the region but for the entire post-cold-war world, and not least for the United States.

AT THE center of one bloc stand Turkey and Israel, two countries that in many ways are natural partners. Having maintained quiet working relations for decades, they entered into a more public and more intense period of cooperation following Israel's agreement with the PLO in September 1993. Both countries are non-Arab, democratic, and Western-oriented. Each maintains a large military and faces a major threat of terrorism. Both put great store in their relationship with the United States. And each has problems with both Syria and Iran, the two countries that happen to stand at the center of the opposing bloc.

Ever since Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in Teheran in 1979, these latter two countries, Syria and Iran, have been each other's closest allies, for the simple reason that they have a host of adversaries in common. For both, the United States is an imperialist power that seeks to dominate the Middle East, despoil its natural resources, enslave its people, and repress its indigenous culture. For both, Israel, the "Zionist entity," is a stand-in for the U.S. on a more local and, if anything, more threatening level. For both, Turkey is the NATO member on their border that represents both an irritant and a constant challenge.

If the core of each bloc is made up of a pair of countries, surrounding them are large, loose networks of teammates. Within the Middle East itself, Turkey and Israel count first and foremost on Jordan, which has had stable relations with Israel for decades and has also readily accepted that country's new friendship with Turkey. Jordan and Turkey themselves have enjoyed consistently good relations since the 1920's. Today, Jordanian and Turkish military pilots train in each other's country; their chiefs of staff meet regularly; and their governments have created a high-level formal grouping to discuss the menace posed to each of them by Iraq, inviting other neighbors to join a "Neighborhood Forum" on these issues. According to Turkey's ambassador to Amman, security cooperation "has reached the point where I can say that the Jordanian and Turkish military forces are integrated into one." A free-trade agreement between Turkey and Jordan is also in the offing.

In addition to Jordan, potential members of the Turkish-Israeli team include Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. (Early this year, a Turkish submarine conspicuously visited both countries.) Turkish Cyprus, it goes without saying, is totally in the Turkish camp. Also friendly are exiled opposition groups from the Middle East's rogue states—Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Libya—plus the Christians of Lebanon and Sudan.

On the opposing side, Syria and Iran can count on a numerically larger group of regional teammates. In addition to Greece—which occupies a position of importance analogous to that of Jordan on the other side—Greek Cyprus, the Palestinian Authority, and the Muslims of Lebanon all weigh in on the Syria-Iran side. Relations are even improving with Iraq, which has nearly always been on bad terms with Syria and Iran alike, and the same holds true for relations with Libya and Sudan. In the constellation of the Middle East, the Kurds present a particularly interesting and paradoxical case: the movements of those living in Iraq and Iran go with

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Turkey-Israel; the Kurds of Turkey, led by Öcalan and the PKK, with Syria-Iran.

Is it possible for a Middle Eastern country to stand outside the two-team framework? Saudi Arabia, which enjoys strong ties with the United States on the one hand and with Syria on the other, is a striking example of a state that has so far avoided choosing sides. But another case in point—Egypt—suggests that true neutrality is hard to sustain. As a major recipient of U.S. aid and the possessor of an increasingly American-style military, and as a country maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel, Egypt would in many ways seem suited to the Turkish-Israeli bloc. But on issue after issue—the Arab-Israeli peace process, nuclear proliferation, relations with Libya, human-rights abuses within Egypt itself—Cairo is on a trajectory that, in the fullness of time, might well land it on the Syrian-Iranian side.

Perhaps the most astonishing feature of the new disposition of forces in the Middle East is how far the networks extend *beyond* that region. As the case of Cyprus suggests, the ancient logic of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" has helped to bring about some peculiar groupings of far-flung teammates. In the Caucasus, to take one example, Azerbaijan and Georgia line up with Turkey, Armenia with Iran. In the Balkans, Macedonia, Bosnia, Slovenia, and Croatia tend toward Turkey's side, Serbia toward Greece and therefore Syria-Iran. And then there is Central Asia, where Kazakstan, Kirgizia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan side with Turkey, Tajikistan with Iran, while Russia, as we have seen, backs Syria-Iran. But within Russia, Chechnya sides more with Turkey-Israel, though Teheran is still hoping to win it over. (In the crazy-quilt pattern of these matters, a leading Chechen figure, Khoj-Ahmed Noukhaev, has asserted that his sympathies are "with the small Jewish nation" against the Arabs; and Chechnya's defense minister happens to be a Jordanian national and former military officer.)

Finally, in South Asia, Israel's long-term quest for better ties with India has been meeting with greater success now that that country is under Hindu-nationalist management; the present government in India has even shown an interest in joining the Turkish-Israeli bond. Pakistan, meanwhile, sides with Syria-Iran, although the tie has frayed somewhat because of the Taliban of Afghanistan, who are at once clients of Pakistan and sworn enemies of Iran. To varying degrees Pakistan has also brought along Burma and Sri Lanka, which are seeking to offset Indian power. China allies with Pakistan to check India, which objectively puts it, too, with Syria-Iran.

NEEDLESS TO say, all these connections are subject to the shifting tides of convenience and tactical advantage. What is impressive, nevertheless, is the extent to which the logic of "my enemy's enemy" can override even such powerful factors as shared religion or ideology. Thus, the fundamentalist Islamic Republic of Iran supports Christian Armenians and Christian Greek Cypriots against the Muslim Turks of Azerbaijan and Cyprus, while Christian Greek democrats find allies among Muslim Kurdish terrorists. Thus, too, secularist, Arab nationalist Baathists of Syria have worked with Shiite Iran against their fellow Baathists in Iraq. And thus Israeli Jews and Christian Armenians, two seemingly natural allies with parallel histories and values, find themselves agreeing on almost nothing because the former side with Turkey and the latter against it.

Still, "my enemy's enemy" only takes one so far; any assessment of the relative strength and cohesion of the two emerging blocs has to look deeper for structural similarities and differences. When it comes to Syria-Iran vs. Turkey-Israel, what is immediately striking, at least on the regional level, are the differences.

Syria-Iran is a rogue's pact. Hounded by their own populations, on the losing side of history, Damascus and Teheran seek solace and aid in each other's arms. At bottom, however, these two governments themselves have little in common: the mullahs in Iran question whether Hafez al-Assad is even a Muslim, and he in turn no doubt sees them as religious fanatics. Such divisions may not invalidate the connection between the two countries, but they do constrain it in significant ways. The Iranians are allowed to operate in Syria-controlled Lebanon, for instance, and they send some oil and tourists to Syria. But substantive and operational links are missing.

The Turkish-Israeli tie is a completely different story. The military dimension alone goes deeper than anything on the other side, extending to the joint production of weapons and the sharing of intelligence. Israeli warplanes train in Turkish air space over the vast plains of Konya, and Turkey sends its pilots to Israel to learn advanced techniques. Joint naval maneuvers were held in January of this year, joint air maneuvers in September.

Even more significant are the non-military dimensions. Thanks to the creation of a free-trade zone and such institutions as the Turkish-Israeli

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Business Council, trade between the two countries is booming, increasing by something like 30 percent a year. Turkey is the number-one tourist destination for Israelis, and authorities in the two countries have dispensed with double taxation. Plans exist for Turkey to send fresh water to Israel via huge bags towed through the sea. A Turkish firm snagged the trophy project of building a terminal at Israel's main airport. And so forth.

Then there are the political and cultural dimensions. Jerusalem has gone to bat for Turkey in Washington, and Ankara has stuck by its Israeli partner even in a den of enemies like the Organization of the Islamic Conference. There are academic exchanges, special exhibits in museums, and even mutual visits by religious leaders, something highly unusual among Jews and Muslims.

The Turkish-Israeli tie, in short, has positive elements, based on interests shared not just by two governments but by two populations (though, conspicuously, not by Turkey's Islamists or leftists). A Turkish analyst, Soli Özel, judges the degree of exchange between the two countries to surpass anything Turkey enjoys with European *or* Middle Eastern states; the only point of comparison is with the United States. Israelis for their part are especially voluble about their friendship with Turkey and what it portends. Uri Bar Ner, Israel's ambassador to Ankara, stated upon his arrival that "we have perfect relations with Turkey," and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has proclaimed the relationship "the main axis, though not the exclusive axis, of a regional security arrangement."

THE DEPTH of these ties contrasts with the superficiality of those between Syria and Iran—if the former relationship resembles that between the United States and Great Britain in World War II, the latter is more reminiscent of that between Germany and Japan. And this is unquestionably a piece of good news. Precisely because the tie extends to so many levels, moreover, from fighter pilots to businessmen to students, it bids fair to last. Indeed, the many-sided nature of the bond is critical to its long-term viability, for the human element turns a utilitarian connection into something approaching a true alliance, which in turn redounds to the strength of the security arrangements.

But that hardly means that, in any serious conflict in the Middle East, the Turkish-Israeli bloc will necessarily prevail, or that its opponents are without the resources to cause havoc. When, in the wake of Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's visit to Israel, a Syrian newspaper condemned Turkey's "suspicious alliance" with the Jewish state, Yilmaz answered with insouciance, "Frankly, I don't care how Syria comments." But there is no mistaking the fury that has been aroused.

The Lebanese foreign minister has termed the Turkish-Israeli-Jordanian connection "a pliers-like, three-way alliance to put the squeeze" on his own country and Syria. In the words of Syria's information minister, it constitutes "a grave threat to Arabs and Muslims." In response to that threat, the Syrian-Iranian side is attempting to organize itself in what the PKK's Öcalan envisions as a "system of alliances of all the peoples of the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East against . . . Turkish fascism." In early September, the Greek foreign minister got together in Teheran with his Armenian and Iranian counterparts; following their meeting, the Iranian media called for a regional defense alliance against Turkey and Israel. According to a report from Cairo, the Egyptian and Iranian foreign ministers plan to have agreements in place by the end of this year.

The upshot is that, welcome as is the emergence of the Turkish-Israeli connection, in the larger context—the context of both teams, with their respective extensions into areas beyond the Middle East—the future is fraught with menace. The very growth of the two teams means that war, should it break out, can now spread faster and farther as local crises intermesh and stakes are raised all along the line. When conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan erupted in 1988, it was isolated, involving no neighboring countries; that is no longer the case. Until yesterday, the Cyprus problem had almost no repercussions even in the Middle East; now it could be the match that lights the fuse on the tinderbox.

THAT IS where the U.S. comes in. Washington officially supports and encourages the Turkish-Israeli bond, but there is no blinking the fact that in some quarters it causes discomfort, if not downright disapproval. When pro-Western states like Turkey, Israel, and Jordan begin to work together, Western analysts inevitably begin tsk-tsking. Thus, according to a *Washington Post* editorial that almost sounds as if it could have been written in Damascus, the trouble with Turkish-Israeli ties is that they may "reduce Israelis' perceived need to negotiate settlements inside that perimeter with the Palestinians and Syria." The London *Economist* goes further, snidely dubbing the Turkish-Israeli "affair" an "inappropriate relationship" and chastis-

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ing Prime Minister Yilmaz for visiting Israel, "the Jewish occupant of Islam's third holiest city."

The Turkish-Israeli connection has also led to a number of potentially problematic realignments in domestic American politics. As pro-Israel lobbying groups have begun to work successfully on Turkey's behalf in a variety of causes, Greek-Americans have pulled away from the Jewish state. When 81 Senators signed a letter in April 1998 calling on the Clinton administration to stop "using public pressure against Israel," Paul Sarbanes of Maryland, a Greek-American and hitherto a long-time supporter of Israel, conspicuously refrained from joining them.

More ominously still, the emergence of the two teams has raised an echo of the cold war. The U.S. is, or is seen to be, on one side of a major regional conflict, Russia on the other. The shipping of Russian arms to Cyprus (and Iran) is only one bone of contention in a list that includes the issue of sanctions against Iraq, the American response to terrorism, Israel and the Palestinians, and so forth. That Russia is now ruled by Yevgeny Primakov, an unreconstructed Brezhnevite whose greatest passion has been to make trouble in the Middle East, offers the prospect of still more disagreements in the future.

Of course, Russia is hardly the threat to world peace it once was, and it is also the case that neither the United States nor Russia is leading its respective alliance; rather, each has been recruited onto an already-existing team. But the disarray in both Washington and Moscow these days means that the foreign policies of both countries display little logic or consistency; given the volatility of the Middle East, that in itself is a worrisome thing.

WHERE ARE we left, then?

The real new Middle East is a region in which arsenals are growing while income shrinks; Arab intransigence toward Israel is hardening; fundamentalist Islam is gaining ground; Iraq is throwing off sanctions; and new rogue regimes—the Palestinian Authority, Sudan, Afghanistan—are being added to old ones. But, in the Turkish-Israel-Jordanian bond, the real new Middle East is also a region lit by one truly promising development—promising for the area, promising for the West, and promising especially for the United States.

At long last, and through no doing of our own, we have been presented with a collection of genuinely cooperative partners in a part of the world where our like-minded friends, however stalwart, have been alarmingly few. The question still waiting to be answered is whether we have the wit, the far-sightedness, and the courage to seize the opportunity before us and, instead of hindering or standing aside, help these partners withstand their enemies and fashion a future they and we can live in.

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Reverend Malthus, Meet Doctor Faustus

Peter W. Huber

In a hastily written pamphlet published anonymously exactly two centuries ago, the Reverend Thomas Malthus supplied the original script. Population increases geometrically, food supplies increase only arithmetically. Sooner or later, the widening gap between supply and demand must end in war, famine, and general misery. If there is one thing certain on earth, it is that geometric growth leads to disaster. The laws of mathematics guarantee it.

This remains the first and most fundamental tenet of modern environmentalism. Humanity's natural tendency, argued Alan Gregg, a vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation, in 1955, is to spread over the surface of the earth like a metastasizing tumor. "Cancerous growths demand food," he wrote, "but, as far as I know, they have never been cured by getting it." The same metaphor is invoked by the renowned Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich. "Growth," he has declared, is "the creed of the cancer cell."

In Malthus's day, nature supplied men with all their food and fuel, and so it must have seemed both obvious and true that when man used up arable nature—land he could farm—he would starve. Two centuries later, the modern Malthusian has updated the script only a bit. We need the earth for food, for genetic stock, and to supply cures for disease. And we need nature to process our wastes, suck carbon dioxide from our air, and detoxify our countless other excretions and emissions. If we are to flourish, we dare not abuse it.

But abuse it is precisely what we have been doing. According to the neo-Malthusian, nature is also our biochemical sentinel: when eagles, frogs, and sandworts pine, they are warning us about pollution that we ourselves are causing, and that will kill us next. Pushed too far, moreover, nature, in the form of the geophysical environment we have altered to suit our pleasure, is bound to take its revenge.

The AIDS pandemic, writes Paul Ehrlich, is attributable to the "deterioration of the epidemiological environment which is quite directly related to population size as well as to poverty and environmental deterioration." Global warming, concludes a Yale virologist, means more mosquitoes, which means new epidemics of dengue fever and yellow fever in North America. The human body is adapted to the background levels of radiation and ultraviolet light in which our Paleolithic ancestors evolved; unless we restore those conditions—by pursuing energy conservation and efficiency, by replacing technological complexity with natural simplicity—we will languish and die.

Nor is nature the only force that will do us in.

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The high technology that subdues nature so effectively will itself end by subduing man, too. Pesticides, nukes, and transgenic mice are inherently unstable. They are like so many sandpiles; in the end, as Vice President Al Gore concludes his 1992 manifesto, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, they are bound to crash down upon us.

To the Vice President, sandpiles, and the "complexity theory" that describes their behavior, explain a lot—from human personality disorders and midlife crises to ozone holes and much of environmental degradation. As in an egg timer, the grains of sand in a sandpile accumulate gently, or seem to, until they reach an abrupt and perhaps catastrophic "cascade of change." This is the inevitable result, writes the Vice President, of the "dangerous bargains with the future" we have struck in our vain attempt "to escape the Malthusian dilemma"—bargains worthy of the "theatrical legend that haunted the birth of the scientific revolution: Doctor Faustus."

Destroying the earth's biodiversity, spraying it with pesticides, loading it up with fertilizers, depleting fisheries, damaging the atmosphere in ways that increase levels of ultraviolet radiation—these are some of the Faustian bargains with unstable technology the Vice President has in mind. And the most intrinsically unstable technology of all is that of the atom. The radioactive sandpile plunging out of control is what Chernobyl was, what Three Mile Island might have been. Finally, the human body is a sandpile, too: a single cell becomes cancerous and in due course the entire organism collapses. The tiniest trace of DDT disrupts the hormones or the immune system, and 60 percent of our cells are put in jeopardy as a result.

Make my day, whispers the technological sandpile. Al Gore hears it.

II

ARE THESE neo-Malthusian assertions true? There are certainly skeptics, and there are certainly grounds for skepticism.

The skeptics typically begin with a damning quotation from Ehrlich's 1968 best-seller, *The Population Bomb*: "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970's and 1980's hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now." Ehrlich was wrong, of course. Since 1968, famine has in fact declined sharply, around the globe.

The skeptics direct their scorn next to the Club of Rome and its 1972 study, *The Limits to Growth*. Humanity was scheduled to run out of gold by 1981, mercury by 1985, tin by 1987, zinc by 1990, petroleum by 1992, and copper, lead, and natural gas by 1993. The experts at the Club of Rome were wrong, too: the average price of all metals and minerals fell by more than 40 percent between 1970 and 1988. Oil is cheaper than ever before. With only a few comparatively modest interruptions, the real price of raw materials has been falling steadily for two centuries.

Indeed, for any commodity that is tracked by paper on exchanges in New York or Chicago, as for all capital, all labor, and all ordinary services like transportation or health care, predictions of pathological disequilibrium have invariably failed. People simply do not run out of things they can package as "property" and trade. With normal markets in command, scarcity always seems to be giving way to abundance.

Similarly with other prophecies of the neo-Malthusians. Every year we manage to grow more food on less land. We used to harvest fuel and rubber from the forest, but we need do so no longer, nor do we even need Brazil's rain forest to supply genes; we can engineer them at will in laboratories in New Jersey. By the same token, doing things "naturally" does not automatically translate into doing them well, or even to the benefit of nature itself. If it is poor economics for a Kamba tribesman to shoot an elephant in Tsavo national park for his cooking pot, shooting the elephant for the entertainment of a wealthy Texan can make both economic and ecological sense: herds end up multiplying when you organize the shooting properly. Since the time of Noah, we have known that animal husbandry is a good idea; that does not mean we are or should be still floating in the ark.

As for swallowing our wastes, nature does indeed have an aptitude for that task, but performs it best under factory-like control, with septic systems run much like breweries. Growing new trees is an excellent way to pull carbon from the air; filling modern landfills is another. We do not maintain Central Park to absorb New York City's wastes, we build dumps and treatment plants instead.

Besides, if nature is an excellent recycling plant for our wastes, it cannot also be a hypersensitive canary, imperiled by those same wastes. The tremblings of other species do teach us some useful things about human biology, but most low-level biochemical effects are genus-specific. A mouse is not a very good model even of a guinea pig; a frog is certainly not a good model of a man. When the

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Environmental Protection Agency declared DDT a human carcinogen, the administrator had to overrule the findings of his own scientific review committee. The ban was good for birds, but no serious evidence of benefit to human health has ever emerged.

Alterations to the geophysical environment? Visions of nature taking its revenge by way of mosquitoes, fevers, and such are as scientifically sound as a Jay Leno monologue. Why should only the species that hate humans thrive on our acts of despoliation? True, our bodies are undoubtedly adapted to the conditions in which they evolved. But they adapted to the Rift Valley and the Himalayas, to sub-Saharan Africa and the Arctic—which is to say, to wide ranges of background radiation, ultraviolet light, oxygen, ozone, and so forth. Technology, moreover, can easily shield us from environmental excrescences, as it has done since man mastered fire. People can wear dark glasses and suntan lotion if they must. They already do.

III

BUT THIS brings us to the technological sandpile—a point about which many an ordinary citizen may well be inclined to agree with the neo-Malthusians. After all, we have *seen* it collapse, right there in the unworkable VCR that sits on top of our television sets. To judge by the popular press, the same hazard exists in jet-plane cockpits and nuclear reactors, with potentially far more devastating consequences. Hairball software and spaghetti hardware will break down because they must. The systems are so complex no one can analyze the possible paths to failure.

The trouble with the neo-Malthusian view is that lots of things are not sandpiles, but instead resemble quite stable gobs of honey. True, chips, gadgets, cars, power plants—the whole lot—keep getting more complex, more layered, more interconnected. But casual intuition to the contrary notwithstanding, they are not getting more brittle. If they were, catastrophic accidents would become more numerous year by year. The contrary seems to be the case: big, catastrophic failures of dams, power plants, jumbo jets, and chemical factories are growing less frequent, not more so. Most technology does not seem to be governed by the law of the sandpile.

Complexity, it turns out, can hide good news as well as bad. Alarms and human or mechanical failsafe systems do sometimes perform unexpectedly badly, but they can also perform unexpectedly well, and often do. Jet planes are never supposed to lose all their hydraulics, for theoretically they cannot be flown when so crippled, but it has happened, and resilient pilots have flown them. A nuclear reactor of U.S. design was never supposed to lose all its coolant and melt down, but one did. Its concrete containment structure was not expected to withstand the heat of meltdown, but it did, easily. There is simply no law, no engineering principle, no rule of thumb linking complexity and catastrophe.

Real systems generally adapt, heal, and compensate. A single photon may knock a single atom out of a critical strand of DNA, but our bodies have been bathed in background radiation for as long as we have lived on earth, and our cells have probably evolved means to repair DNA in much the same way they have evolved means to repair skin punctured by thorns. Similarly, the feedback loops of high technology are designed layer upon layer upon layer to be healing, and robust.

To the extent one dares generalize about technology at all, complexity correlates quite well with better, safer, and cleaner. More gates in a Pentium, more lines of code in WordPerfect, more parts in a Buick, do mean more opportunities for something to break, but also more opportunities to compensate. There is no empirical basis at all to conclude that software, reactors, or aircraft must be unreliable, dangerous, or dirty just because they are hard to analyze. Making things more complex certainly need not make them better. But making things better very often means making them more complex.

At its best, moreover, complexity is precise, compact, and frugal. Nuclear power extracts limitless energy from the tiniest amounts of material precisely because it extracts subatomically. Microwave ovens are efficient because their energy is tuned to the resonant frequency of water molecules. Improved genes in rice substitute for a chemical factory producing phosphates or fertilizers. Irradiation is an excellent preservative because its energy disrupts precisely the chemical bonds we want disrupted, the ones that the salmonella bacterium most needs to live. In medicine, the best drugs are likewise the ones most meticulously engineered to affect specific cells, or specific proteins on the surface of the cells. In that context, nobody dismisses complexity as "unreliable" or "brittle." It is just the opposite.

Thanks to complexity, mankind's energy-channeling systems will not inevitably collapse into destructive chaos, as the neo-Malthusians vaguely insist they must. To the contrary, each advance is

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likely to spawn another, complexity giving way to still higher complexity, and therefore still greater efficiency, indefinitely into the future.

IV

SHOULD WE be happy about all this? That depends on what makes us happy. The fact is that, although skeptics have good answers to neo-Malthusian arguments about our predicament, and although they understand that efficiency and complexity are not enemies but partners, that does not really dispose of the matter.

For one thing, efficiency itself, especially in the form of energy conservation, hardly precludes "cancerous" consumption. Our ceilings today are insulated twice as well as they were twenty years ago, our walls 40-percent better, our floors four times as well. New furnaces, air-conditioning units, heat pumps, refrigerators, water heaters, furnaces, washers, dishwashers, and cars use much less energy than their predecessors. Nobody can dispute the real gains that have been made in this realm, any more than one can dispute the gains made with sweeteners that deliver no calories.

Alas, those gains are all around us. For years, Americans have been consuming more and more low-cal and low-fat substitutes, and, diet sodas in hand, they have grown steadily fatter. The diet refrigerators they have built to hold their diet sodas have resulted in still more gains: more power plants, and more coal mines, too. In 1975, the United States consumed 71 quadrillion BTU's of energy; two decades later, the number stood at 91 "quads"—a gain of a quad a year, the arrival of all that wonderful efficiency notwithstanding.* As for electricity, over the course of the 1990's the average American has increased his annual consumption by about 2 megawatt hours—a bit more than the increase over the course of the 1980's.

Part of the steady rise can be blamed on our growing population (from 215 million to 263 million in the same twenty-year period), and putting things in per-capita terms may make the numbers look a bit less dispiriting: the rate of growth of our overall per-capita energy consumption has indeed slowed a bit. But much of that is attributable to demographic change, an aging population in particular. And the slight slowing in the rate of growth provides an illusory sense of progress. If you were to gain five pounds a year every year, your "rate of growth," calculated as a percentage of your current weight, would also shrink; but you would never know it from your waistband.

The real point, however, is that, as Malthus himself predicted, population increases to consume the resources available—and *efficiency expands resources.* At the turn of the last century, electrical generators operated at about 1 percent of their theoretical limits; today's generators produce 50 times as much electricity from the same amount of fossil fuel. But, overall, they also burn 50 times more fossil fuel. However unlikely it may seem, the individual consumer ends up consuming more, not less, when all his motors and engines become more efficient.

Why? First of all, more efficient almost always means much less expensive. Since refrigerators are a lot more efficient, people can now buy bigger ones, and they do. And better ones: frost-free units with ice makers, which gobble up almost all the energy saved by the superefficient compressor at the back. It is the same with planes and cars: more efficient engines mean cheaper travel, so you travel more. And it is the same with just about everything else: today's soda cans contain one-fifth the aluminum they did three decades ago, but the number of cans purchased has grown by an even larger multiple.

Second, and much more important, is the wealth effect. At some point people may grow tired of refrigerators, but they always want more money, and they will find ways to spend it. With the money saved by your efficient new gas furnace in the basement, you can fly to Aspen for a weekend in the snow. "Efficient," in short, has nothing to do with "frugal." Our atavistic appetites, our genes themselves, remember famine too well to be fooled by Nutrasweet. However plentiful our plenty, we will hunt and gather more. It may not be good for us, and it may not be good for the environment, but nothing stops it: not efficiency, not politics, not even war.

That, indeed, is why the neo-Malthusians are right to have replaced Malthus's emblematic worry about starvation with its metaphoric opposites: obesity and cancer. Malthus said we would famish when we ran out of land; it now appears that if we run out of land, it will be because we gorge.

V

WHAT THIS means is that any rejection of the neo-Malthusian argument must come with heavy qualifiers.

Mankind apprehends, today, the basic bioengineering mechanics of creation. We understand—

* A quadrillion is 1,000,000,000,000,000. A quad of BTU's comes in 183,000,000 barrels of petroleum, 38,500,000 tons of coal, or 980,000,000,000 cubic feet of natural gas.

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not wholly, but largely—how the "blind watchmaker" (in the term popularized by Richard Dawkins) builds the eye itself. We understand the smallpox virus, an ancient, evil scourge of humanity—we understand it so well, in fact, that we have banished it from the face of the planet while simultaneously conserving a complete record of its genetic code. We are now poised to eradicate ancestral perils embedded in our own genes.

Give us another few decades—an inconsequential tick of the clock in the span of biological history—and our species' mastery of the rest of nature will be approaching completion. After the Flood, God directs Noah to "subdue" creation, to take "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." To the extent we today can think of nature as benign, it is because we have obeyed that one command so very faithfully.

But the benignity of nature is hardly the issue. Indeed, the fundamental difference between the neo-Malthusian and the skeptic is that the latter declines to consider the whole of natural creation in the same light as a dairy cow. Cows have been bred to wish us well, but nature as a whole has not. Nature does not wish man good *or* evil, it does not wish him anything. It wholly lacks an attitude.

We know this on the authority of Charles Darwin. The gazelle's genes have no interest whatsoever in the ultimate survival of cheetahs, and the same goes for the cheetah vis-à-vis the gazelle. The tapeworm evolves to reside in our intestines; our bodies evolve to expel it. There is no scientific reason to believe that "the balance of nature" is generally good for humans; indeed, there is no reason to believe in ecological "balance" at all.

To the skeptic, the one profound ethical fact that emerges from Darwin's *The Origin of Species* is that nature as a whole is neither benign nor malign, it just does not care. Science has a phrase for this moral blindness, this complete and absolute indifference to the interest of any and all. It is called survival of the fittest, and as far as the rest of nature is concerned, the trouble these days is that our species is very fit indeed.

We can subdue at will, and, with transgenic mice and cloned sheep, replenish at will, too. The fear of us, the dread of us, is upon every living creature that dwells on earth. If we ourselves were to conjure up new gods, it would be comic to imagine them dwelling inside redwoods or blue whales, as our more devout environmentalists tend to do. Genentech's laboratories are more like it.

Trees and whales were designed by a blind watchmaker; vaccines and nuclear power plants were designed by watchmakers who can see, and very well. High technology is complex, but it is much less complex than nature. It is fickle, but much less fickle than nature. It is unstable, but it is much less unstable than nature. From pesticides to nukes, high technology is a peril not for the reason invoked by the neo-Malthusians—because it will turn against us—but because it usually does exactly what we ask of it. It makes us so very fit to survive that nothing else in creation really stands a chance.

The ugliest conclusion is also the most plausible: we can go it alone. All we need is energy, and we know how to get it from many more places than plants do. We do not need the forest for medicine; as often as not, we need medicine to protect us from what emerges by blind chance from the forest. We do not need other forms of life to maintain a breathable balance of gas in the atmosphere, or a temperate climate. We do not need redwoods and whales at all, not for ordinary life at least, any more than we need Plato, Beethoven, or the stars in the firmament. Cut down the last redwood for chopsticks, harpoon the last blue whale for sushi, and the additional mouths fed will nourish additional human brains, which have already invented ways to replace blubber with Olestra and pine with plastic. If humans multiply as the sands on the shore, the entire surface of the planet can end up like Manhattan, only without Central Park.

VI

THESE THOUGHTS of high-tech hell may sound repellent; they are meant to. If technology and complexity do not guarantee calamity, as the neo-Malthusians maintain they do, they also do not guarantee felicity, as the neo-Faustians among us—and there *are* neo-Faustians among us—tend to claim they will.

"We have entered a period of sustained growth that could eventually double the world's economy every dozen years and bring increasing prosperity for—quite literally—billions of people on the planet." So declare Peter Schwartz and Peter Leyden in "The Long Boom," a 1997 article in *Wired* magazine. Four "great waves of technology" are already propelling huge increases in productivity and "explosive" growth, from chips and the Internet to the transformations wrought by biotechnology in medicine and agriculture. But the best is yet to come: a "fifth wave," based on hydrogen as an alternative source of energy, that will save the environment.

All megatrend optimists, like all megatrend pes-

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simists, sound much the same. Sweeping vision, exponential change, grand prescription; epochs, waves, general advancement. The human mind can assign no fixed limits to its own progress in knowledge and virtue, or even to the prolongation of bodily life. So said the Marquis de Condorcet in 1795; so say Newt Gingrich and *Wired* today. Flip all the highs to lows, and you have Thomas Malthus or Paul Ehrlich.

The fallacy that more technology automatically means more human happiness should have been laid to rest with the corpse of Marxism. To the Marxists, there were no limits to industrial progress, no social ills that could not be cured by a new dam, a new power plant, or a new salmon-canning factory. More coal, more steel, more engines, more smoke stacks, would lift humanity ever upward. They did, but only where the *political* environment remained healthy. Elsewhere, technological progress amplified the power of the gulag and the gas chamber.

This is another way of saying that high technology serves our known human propensities. Some human watchmakers are inept, and some are evil. We have to pick and choose among them with even greater fear and trembling than we picked and chose among the passion fruits and poison ivies. In this as in every other field of human endeavor, politics, in the broadest sense of the term, remains paramount.

But so does aesthetics. The natural world—a world infinitely more complex than the most complex piece of technology we have yet to devise—merits our solicitude not because it is safe, and not because it is stable, but because it is beautiful. Whatever Al Gore may say, there is no spirit of the sandpile, no irreducible instability in technology. But slashing and burning the rain forest is ugly anyway. We should revere life on earth not because we fear catastrophic failure but because life is a good that requires no further justification, and because it would be an abomination—an aesthetic abomination—to destroy the book of life before we have even found the time to read it.

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The Road to Naybikhov

Hillel Halkin

After a while, it went away. For a day or two, though, driving the long, straight roads on which we were often the only car for miles, it kept coming back, far down the road, like a mirage or a defect in my retina: a wagon with a Jew in it.

Horse-drawn wagons are plentiful; Jews are rare. This is the paradox of the modish pursuit of Jewish roots in what were once the shtetls, the towns and villages, of the Pale of Settlement of the Russian empire. Nowhere else in Europe can one see so unchanged the physical world in which Jews lived 100 years ago. The Jews alone are gone from it.

I had been to Russia and Ukraine once before, as a correspondent, in 1995, spending a week in Moscow and a week in Kiev: long enough to glimpse from close up the utter destruction of Russian Jewry's own roots (to glimpse, too, the devastation wreaked on Russia by 70 years of Soviet rule). I had wanted to get to the countryside, especially to the little village in White Russia—Belarus, as it now is called—in which my father lived until he was twelve; but there had not been time.

Late last spring I went.

Naybikhov, the place was called in Yiddish; Novibychov in Russian; and it had taken me a long time to get there, because already as a child I was prepared to set out. Not so much because of anything my father told me. The youngest of seven brothers and sisters, he did not like to talk about his childhood, the mere mention of which made him melancholy—a curious response, I thought, considering that the poverty he was raised in was never dire and that my aunts and uncles claimed he was the family pet. Nor, when it came to their family, did the Holocaust throw a dark shadow, practically all of their close relatives having, like them, left for America before World War I.

It was my aunts and uncles who told me most of the little I knew about Naybikhov, and although they never spoke of it nostalgically, something in me stirred to what I heard. No doubt this was a result of growing up on a fifth floor in Manhattan, from the parqueted heights of which I yearned precociously for the country. Anything smelling in my imagination of dirt, soil, rotting leaves, manure, cows, horses, toolsheds, woodpiles, the smoke of fireplaces, excited me, the son of a college professor who could not swim but had lived in a log cabin overlooking the Dnieper, with a wood-burning stove, and a yard, and a cow that was milked every day, and a vegetable garden on top of the hill that sloped steeply down to the river, and water fetched from there in buckets, and the boats heading downstream from Mogilev to Gomel, or even all the way to Kiev, and sometimes tying up to take on

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passengers. I loved rivers, lakes. High and dry between one summer vacation and the next, I would have traded my childhood for my father's. I would have made better use of his than he did.

So I had dreamed of Naybikhov. But children do not travel to the lands of their dreams; and as I grew older there were other places to visit. Besides which, one could not tour freely under the Soviets. Nor was I even sure that Naybikhov still existed, having been informed by a Jew I met in Israel that it was leveled during the war. By the time it was possible to reach it unchaperoned, and I found a map establishing that it was there (some 25 miles from Bychov, on the road to Rogachov, the *rogachove gass* my aunts and uncles remembered), along came the meltdown at Chernobyl. Naybikhov was less than 200 kilometers to the north. Better not, I was warned.

In any case, long before then I had begun traveling to the shtetl in other ways. With no conscious connection to Naybikhov, I had drifted, at first quite inadvertently, into being a translator of Hebrew literature; and the Hebrew literature I loved most, and was (on the rare occasions when a publisher could be found for it) happiest translating, was of the early modern period—the literature produced in Eastern Europe from 1880 to 1914 by writers like Mendele Mokher Seforim, M. Z. Feierberg, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, Yosef Hayyim Brenner, Uri Nisan Gnessin, and Hayyim Nahman Bialik. Born and raised in the Pale of Settlement, all of these men wrote extensively about its towns and villages—many of whose names I knew as well from another Hebrew genre, 19th-century collections of hasidic tales like *The Praises of the Baal Shem Tov* and *The Life of Our Master Nahman of Bratslav*.

Eventually, I began to translate from Yiddish, too: Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Mendele once again—and once again, the shtetl was the venue. And so when I flew last May with a friend to Kiev, where we were met by a car with a driver and an interpreter and driven off into rural Ukraine and Belarus, I was not stepping into an entirely unknown world. I had lived in it, on and off, for a long time.

SPREAD OUT on my knees, the road map, despite its strange spellings, confirmed this: Berdicev, Polonoje, Braclav, Vinnica, Meziboz, Skvira, Nemirov, Satanov, Sargorod—I had been to them all. In Bojarka, alias Boiberik, I had spent four months with Sholem Aleichem's Tevye the dairyman; Zitomir was the site of Bialik's mischievous and mournful adolescence; on a frozen winter day in Kamenka the Baal Shem Tov had warmed his disciples by lighting a tree with a touch of his finger; Uman was where Nahman of Bratslav went to die, and more mysteriously, to befriend heretics; in the company of the narrator of Sholem Aleichem's *Railroad Stories*, I had passed through Zmerinka, Gajsin, Teplik, Tulčin, Beršad, Obodovka.

One of our first stops was Zhitomir. Bialik's low, one-story house, looking like all the others on its block, was for sale. The owners wanted $7,000. Yes, they knew a famous Jew had lived in it. Two or three tourists had been there before us.

We were not invited inside, and I did not get to see the kitchen and bedroom that were probably all there was of it. But it would not have surprised me to hear a cricket shrilling there like the one that had moved in when Bialik was a boy,

> A retiring fellow; he kept out of sight
> And fretted in chinks of the gloom-
> blackened night,
> A poet who had only one song to sing
> And sang it, and sang it, and sang it.

It would not have surprised me because of the backyard. It was the exact same yard as the one described in Bialik's story, "Beyond the Fence," written in Odessa in 1909. Nothing—the rotting timbers, the collapsing sheds, the piles of junk—had been removed. No one had bothered to fix the hole in the fence through which Noyekh, the teenage son of Hanina-Lipa and Tsipa-Leah, crept for his trysts with Marinka, who lived next door with her Jew-hating stepmother Shkuripinshchtikha.

It was that way everywhere. I recognized it all: the pine forests and the birch forests, the enormous fields of pale green wheat, the vast, flat distances, the sandy dirt roads, the tin roofs of the houses, the picket fences, the chickens pecking by the roadside, the lilac bushes tall as trees, the high fur hats of the storks' nests, the kerchiefed women on the benches. "I know that goat!" I cried as we passed through Chmelnik. It had a white beard and was reaching, its head between two pickets, for the neighbor's cabbages. "It's just a goat," said my friend, who had thought the chickens were just chickens. But it wasn't. It was Mendele's.

On a hilltop in Medzhibozh, where the Baal Shem Tov lived and is buried, I stood looking down at the Bug River; on its far bank, in the village of Trebikhabtsi, rose a white Orthodox church. Once the Baal Shem Tov was asked by a Gentile why the Jews shake back and forth in prayer. "Do you see

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that man swimming?" he asked, pointing to the river. "If you didn't know what he was doing, you would think he was just waving his arms, but unless he waved them he would drown. We pray to keep our souls from drowning."

I knew the river, then, too.

It was the first generations of Hasidim with their peripatetic rabbis and disciples who sacralized the geography of Eastern Europe. Until then, apart from the land of Israel, Jews had their holy places—tombs and synagogues, for the most part—but not their holy regions; the road from the grave of one *tsaddik* to the next, the street between two houses of prayer, were an ordinary road and street. Except for historical chronicles and the titles of rabbis—Meir of Regensburg, the Maharal of Prague, etc.—places had little importance in Jewish literature. A people in exile, the Jews lived where they lived and made little of it.

Beginning in the 18th century, Hasidism changed that:

> Once the Baal Shem Tov was traveling from the village of Chertri, and when he came to a forest where several Jews had been murdered he stopped for the night to banish the evil spirit of murder from the place. "I mean to sleep," he told his disciples, "but you stay awake and say Psalms, because my Christian servant plans to kill us here.". . . And again, before Nemirov, his servant sought to kill him and confessed. "What made you think such a thing?" asked the Baal Shem Tov. "Don't you know I can't be outwitted?"

The road from Chertri to Nemirov now marked a religious drama. Every Jew who knew this story felt a tremor as he passed the forest in which the Baal Shem Tov had slept—and if he did not know which exact forest it was, every woods along the way shone darkly with numinous possibility.

IT HAS been claimed by searchers for Jewish continuity that the earliest modern Hebrew and Yiddish fiction grew out of the genre of the hasidic tale. This may be, although such fiction would have developed under the impact of Russian and Western culture in any event. The first Hebrew novel ever written, Joseph Perl's whackily brilliant *Revealer of Secrets* (1819), was in fact an anti-hasidic tale, a wild parody of hasidic writings. But what Hasidism certainly did do for the Jews of Eastern Europe was to invest the everyday with a significance even greater than Judaism—a religion notorious for its attention to life's minutiae—had given it until then. A Jew had always had a blessing to say for washing his hands, for whatever he ate or drank, for a rainbow or a thunderclap. He did not have one for tying his shoelaces; but who did not know the story of the hasidic disciple who never took his eyes off his rabbi because even the way the rabbi tied his shoes conveyed profound and holy mysteries?

The belief that all things are pregnant with meaning underpins modern European realism, too; and if today we know more about the daily life of the shtetl's Jews than we do about any other Jews before them, this is not only because it is closer to us in time, or because we have photographic and other documentary evidence of it, but because it fully engaged the imagination of the literature that it engendered. When Mendele, in his early Hebrew story, "The Place of Secret Thunder," describes with Breughelesque comedy a Sabbath afternoon in the shtetl, its old men and women sitting on their stoops, "sneezing, belching, yawning, and trumpeting their noses, or else munching on chickpeas and beans"; its children, "their faces covered with slime," splashing "in the moldy water running out of a broken pipe"; its "nursing mother [who] bares a breast for her bawling baby and wipes the juices running from its nose while venting her aches, pains, and peeves on all her enemies," and so on, he is doing what no Jewish writer did before him: painting a broad canvas of a community from which nothing, as it were, is left out. His reported boast that, were the shtetl to vanish, it could be reconstructed in its entirety from his books, was not entirely bravado.

There was something unique about this. Prior to post-World War II America, no other Jewish society in the Diaspora took this kind of interest in itself. It did not happen in Germany, or in England, or in Italy, or in France, let alone among Ladino-speaking Jews in Turkey, Greece, and the Balkans, or among Arabic-speaking Jews in the Middle East. And with it came a degree of self-awareness that was unprecedented, too. Unlike our perceptions of other historical Jewish communities, which are often quite different from the ways they viewed themselves, our perceptions of the shtetl, however inconsistent or contradictory, tend to be the shtetl's own. Whether we think of it as a place of great material poverty and spiritual riches; or as a hopeless quagmire of pettiness, zealotry, squalor, and ennui; or as the scene of a mighty struggle for the Jewish soul among religion, revolution, and Zionism; or as the home of a vital secular Yiddish culture tragically nipped in the bud by Hitler and Stalin; or, on the

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contrary, as an exhausted form of life that had no future anyway, we are saying nothing about it that it did not say volubly about itself.

When we talk about the specialness of the East European Jewish experience, it is this, then, that we are talking about. Other Jewish communities knew extremes of poverty and piety; others experienced the conflict of tradition and modernity; others fought over the same responses to this conflict, had their Orthodox, their Zionists, and their Communists, and were at most a generation or two behind. The Jewish Baghdad of 1940 was in many ways remarkably like the Jewish Warsaw of 1900. It did not, however, have a literature. Today we can read the fiction of Israeli writers like Sami Mikha'el and Eli Amir and learn a great deal about it. Yet retrospective literature about a society, even by those who grew up in it, is not the same as the literature of a society. The Baghdad of the 1940's is mute. It will always need our interpretation. The shtetl preempts it.

BEFORE IT can be rediscovered, the past must be lost. Once, most people could safely assume that the world they grew up in closely resembled their great-grandfathers'. Today we are into roots.

But there are other reasons for the increased interest of Jews in the shtetl and for the growing number of books about it—books that, happily, have joined Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog's saccharine *Life Is With People* (1952), for years the subject's standard and practically only text, on the library shelves.

One reason has been mentioned: the fact that, starting with the liberalization of the Soviet Union and its satellites in the 1980's, the rural regions of western Russia and Poland have become increasingly accessible. Not that tourism there does not frequently still run to the bizarre. In Kamanetsk-Podolsk—a middle-sized Ukrainian city with a shambles of an old acropolis that, properly restored, could vie in charm with any Italian hill town—I stayed for a pittance in a three-room suite in the best hotel, with fancy carpets, mirrored walls, armoires full of old porcelain, no hot water, and no elevator to take me and my luggage to the fourth floor. But with many more Jewish travelers visiting and writing about the places from which most American Jews descend, there has developed not only an acquaintance with them, but an entire genre—the shtetlogue—complete with its stock scenes and situations. The successful or disappointed hunt for the family house and graves—the forlornly untended Jewish cemetery—the old synagogue turned into a pizzeria or discotheque—the elderly Gentile recalling Jewish neighbors—the visit to the field, ravine, or ditch in which the town's Jews were shot—the last Jew of Dobroslavka or Podorosk: when so little is left, it cannot but repeat itself.

Concurrently, over 50 years after the Holocaust, the number of Jews who were actually raised in shtetls and remember them is dwindling rapidly; soon the last of them will be gone. This has led to a last-minute rush to record what can still be gotten down, a collective effort ranging from mammoth undertakings like Steven Spielberg's oral-interview project at Yale to individual attempts to document the memories and knowledge of the survivors of specific communities.

Nor has the Holocaust itself, as might perhaps have been expected, gradually receded with time to the peripheries of American Jewish consciousness. Rather, it seems to become more central every year. One can only speculate why. The extremely slow wearing-off of the protective numbness of the postwar years? The still-festering wound of guilt in an American Jewish community that might have brought more pressure to bear on its leaders to try mitigating or obstructing Hitler's genocide? A liberal identification with the earth's oppressed that, discomfited by American Jewish affluence and Israel's long rule over the Palestinians, has turned to the Holocaust to reclaim a Jewish place, as it were, out of the sun? The shtetl, in any case, accounted for over two-thirds of the Nazis' Jewish victims.

Not unrelatedly, the shtetl is also much on the minds of those assertive proponents of a new Diasporism who have become steadily more vocal on the American Jewish scene. Their disillusion with both Israel and suburban synagogue Judaism has caused them to regard the shtetl—its material simplicity; its religious passion; its human solidarity and strong labor movement; its rich folklore; its humor; even (as demonstrated by the current popularity of *klezmer* bands and Yiddish clubs) its music and its language—as an alternative model of Jewishness. What cannot be brought back to life can, or so it is claimed, be emulated.

DIFFERENT REASONS, different books.

It was for the new Jewish seeker of roots that Chester G. Cohen published his *Shtetl Finder* back in 1989. A gazetteer skimpy in information, it nevertheless provides a helpful list of over 2,000 once heavily Jewish localities in Eastern Europe. Naybikhov, I noticed in planning my trip, was not on it. Dovsk, some twenty miles farther south, the vil-

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lage my father was born in and his family left when he was a year old, was. The *Shtetl Finder* said of it:

> Located east of Rogatchov. 1894—Volf Braginski was local deputy for the Eretz Israel farmers and workers support association. Birthplace of Simon Halkin, born 1899, who moved to the United States in 1914 and was a Hebrew poet and author.

This was curious because my Uncle Simon once wrote some semi-light verse about Dovsk that described it as a tiny hamlet compared to Naybikhov:

> Twelve houses and a half—all this
> Was yours, Dovsk, and a station, too:
> A child's isle in an endless blue
> Of sky and of hushed, murmured bliss.

Dovsk, though, turned out to have developed into a sizable town, possessing, besides what looked like its original twelve-and-a-half houses along the Naybikhov road, extensive clumps of Soviet apartment blocks further on. But where was the station? "The nearest railroad runs through Gomel," an old woman told me. But an older one knew: "It's gone now. Yekaterina slept there." Of course. My aunts and uncles had told me Dovsk stood at the crossroads of the Moscow-Warsaw and Odessa-Petersburg carriage ways. Catherine the Great's horses must have been changed at the relay post.

So IT goes with the voyager to the shtetl: equipped with a map that may contain no more than a single street, house, or landmark, the contribution of a lone photograph or memory salvaged from parents or relatives asked too late or too little, or, assembled with the help of numerous informants, a detailed grid of a place that existed 60 or 90 years ago, he matches it against a reality to which it may bear great or small resemblance. He has traveled thousands of miles to somewhere that few or no foreigners ever get to in the hope of seeing not, like the adventurous tourist, what could never have been imagined but what has always been imagined; so that, drawing near at last, he cannot help feeling, like the South-African-born English writer Dan Jacobson upon visiting his grandfather's native Lithuanian town of Varniai in his fine family memoir *Heshel's Kingdom* (1998), "a strange nervousness," soon to be "replaced by a misgiving in nature. What threatened me now was anticlimax merely."*

Theo Richmond, also an English Jew and the author of *Konin: One Man's Quest for a Vanished Jewish Community* (1996), had similar forebodings. On the train from Warsaw to his mother's shtetl in Poland, his "temples began throbbing insistently. The pressure had been there since breakfast, a tremulous apprehension, a fear knotting my stomach. And now, getting closer to Konin by the minute, I felt the knot tighten." Suppose he were to discover, as Jacobson feared, "that I had come here for nothing"?

Indeed, apart from two Jewish women, one living alone and one married to a Gentile, nothing is what Jacobson found. A few hours after arriving in Varniai, he was ready to depart. "So, like the site of my grandfather's grave," he writes,

> the whereabouts of his house and *shul* remain hidden from me. Should I hunt for them further? . . . To what end? I find a shrinking in myself from the prospect of hunting around the town and eventually gazing at a street of unplastered brick houses like all the others; or some little apartment block, or group of shops, or clinic, or set of school buildings.

Richmond, on the other hand, found a great deal, not only because Konin, unlike Varniai, was physically unharmed by the war, but because he had spent years interviewing its locatable survivors and meticulously plotting its geography. And yet after spending several days in it, he feels even emptier than Jacobson:

> From the beginning I had known I would have to come here. Now the journey was done. Curiosity was satisfied, an ache assuaged. To say I felt regret leaving this place would be false and sentimental. I felt no emotion. Maybe it was spent. Or maybe the town was releasing me from its grip, for I knew now that it was not the place that held meaning for me but the people who once lived here. Their Konin would stay with me always, a persistent echo.

It was not the place that held meaning but the people: how many pilgrims to the shtetl must have made this ruefully enlightening discovery! A few days after my visit to Naybikhov I attended a conference of Russian Jewish intellectuals in Samara, an industrial city on the Volga. Invited to speak, I told them of my experience and asked, "How many of you have been to your family's shtetl?" Not one of 30 people raised a hand.

At first this amazed me. Why, they could have gotten there and back in a weekend! But that was the point. Had my father grown up in Scranton or Des

* An excerpt from this book was published under the title "Lithuanian Pastoral" in COMMENTARY, October 1997.

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Moines, would I have taken a weekend to visit it? Probably not. What might I have expected to see there that I had not seen a thousand times before? Without its Jews, without its literature, their parents or grandparents' shtetl was, for the conference's participants, just another hick town in a landscape—as a survivor of Polish Bransk says to Eva Hoffman, author of *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (1997)—"soaked with blood." In the final analysis, so it struck Jacobson and Richmond, too.

No, it is the Jewish life once lived in the shtetl that amazes—its intensity and its variety. Richmond, who laboriously constructs, piece by piece, a diorama of this life in the Konin of the 1920's and 30's, paints a vivid picture: Hasidim and Misnagdim; religious Jews and secular Jews; Yiddish-speaking Jews and Polish-speaking Jews; brainy Jews and tough Jews; Jews who were doctors, lawyers, teachers, tailors, porters, stonemasons, upholsterers, athletes, musicians, Bundists, Communists, Zionists of every stripe; Jews with names like Stein the Cossack, Simcha Schnorrer, Moishe Pot-of-Semolina, and the Red Rebbe; Jews who had Jewish soccer teams, Jewish ballroom dances, and Jewish theater groups performing Ibsen.

Richmond observes that Konin, in western Poland, was in some ways not a typical shtetl. One informant says of it: "We were more emancipated than many others in Poland because we were near Germany." But no shtetl was entirely typical; every shtetl was nearer to or farther from somewhere; every shtetl was a place that had evolved in time and was changing. The Konin of 1910, had Richmond found anyone to remember it, was not the Konin of 1930. Nor would the Konin of 1950 or 1990, had the Holocaust not taken place, have been the Konin of 1939.

It is important to keep these obvious truths in mind because, in thinking and speaking about the shtetl, we sometimes treat it as a timeless essence located in an East European Everywhere. This pitfall is avoided by Richmond and Hoffman, as it is by Yaffa Eliach in her newly published *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*,* a book that follows the development of one community—the Lithuanian town of Eisiskes, some 50 miles south of Vilna, just across the Belorussian border—over nearly a millennium. A native of Eisiskes, Eliach, in her vast ambition to recreate "the vanished Jewish market town I had once called home," has written a compendious work, the equivalent of a one-volume encyclopedia that makes massive use of archives and historical documents no less than oral sources and deals with every conceivable aspect of a shtetl's life.

But the literature of the shtetl is something else. It is not even what we find in *Luboml: The Memorial Book of a Vanished Shtetl* (1997), one of a moving genre of "*Yizkor* books," memorial volumes put out in Israel by survivors of individual shtetls, and the first to be translated into English. Here is a passage from Eliach's chapter on Eisyshok's *heders* or schoolrooms:

> With or without the aid of their teachers, the little children who sat in the *heder* from dawn to dusk looked to their imaginations for help in memorizing their lessons, seeking to associate the letters of the *aleph bet* with all the sights and sounds of the world that was just outside their windows, yet ever far away.

And here, in a story written in 1897, is Mordecai Ze'ev Feierberg's description of a young boy looking out one such window as evening descends in late autumn:

> The mud in the streets seemed neck-high. Beneath an overcast sky, the wind whipped thin drops of rain that beat furiously against the passersby, who walked bent beneath the sufferance of their torn, ragged cloaks, which were soaked through with rain and grime. . . . I, Hofni, loved to stand at such times on a bench by the window of the *heder* and look out; I loved to watch the spray and the pockmarks that formed on the surface of the puddles when the rain spattered down on them; I loved to look at the doleful faces of the people as they fought their best with the flagstones and planks of wood that had been strewn about to make footpaths. . . . Mire and muck, figures in silhouette, houses like sepulchers, wet stone, bits of broken glass, snow and rain mixed together . . . all were engraved on my heart in a grim and terrible hand.

In Feierberg's story, we are *in* the shtetl as we are not in Eliach's book; there is no way her writing could convey as does his the chill, damp feel of a poor Ukrainian town pelted at dusk by a November sleet. But we are not just there; we are also in the consciousness of a boy; and it is a particular consciousness, already gloomy and fearful at a young age and taking what pleasure it can in its

* Little, Brown, 960 pp., $40.00. This is the town whose pictorial representation dominates a section of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

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gloom. In a word, it is profoundly melancholic.

Hofni's melancholy, however, is not his alone, or even just Feierberg's. It is the dominant tone in the Hebrew and Yiddish literature of the age. This melancholy, pervasive even in works ostensibly comic or defiant, is largely ignored by today's writers on the shtetl, who take a more sanguine view of its life than did its own writers. Their need to mourn it; or to mobilize it as a model; or to respect it as an ancestral past; or simply their unawareness of the literary evidence, has caused them to overlook the latter.

Although Eliach's chapter on the *heder*, for instance, is a first-rate summation of a shtetl education, one would never guess, despite its section on "Punishment," its mention of the *heder*'s onerously long hours and months of study, and its statement that "the method of teaching was monotonous and boring," how many unforgivingly bitter accounts of such an education were written by men who felt that their childhoods were stolen or destroyed by it. In hundreds of additional stories, poems, memoirs, and essays, these same men portrayed the shtetl as an asphyxiatingly dreary and provincial place, in which the sheer struggle to keep body and soul alive ground its inhabitants brutally down. Considering that some 2.5 million of these inhabitants fled to the United States and other countries between the early 1880's and the outbreak of World War I, we must take the literary evidence at face value.

WE MUST also, of course, heed our warning against generalizing across time. It may well be that this period was a particularly bad one for the shtetl's Jews, one in which overpopulation caused by a soaring birth rate and falling death rate that had tripled their numbers in the 19th century, and the steady growth of the official and popular anti-Semitism nourished by this demographic explosion, created an unprecedentedly grim reality.

Certainly, in the immediate aftermath of World War I, life in the shtetl changed for the better—at least once the Ukrainian massacres of 1920-21 were over. (It forms a strange lacuna in contemporary Jewish historical awareness that accounts of anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe tend to go straight from czarist pogroms to the Holocaust, skipping over the murder of 100,000 Ukrainian Jews during the Russian civil war.) To take the case of education again: by the early 1920's, a boy in independent Poland or Lithuania, or even in Soviet Russia, could pick from a wide range of excellent secular Jewish schools that were open to girls as well. The temporary cessation of government anti-Semitism; the introduction of the radio, the cinema, and motor transport; the decline of religious observance and authority; and the growth of movements like Zionism and Bundism with their many social organizations and activities—all this made shtetl life more open, less isolated, and less oppressive, especially for young people who did not have to support a family. That is why Richmond and Hoffman, whose informants grew up in these years, can paint a credible picture of the shtetl as a not unattractive place. Born 30 years later, Feierberg's Hofni might have felt the same way.

But there is a catch to all this that American Jews are only too familiar with. For the freer the atmosphere of the shtetl grew, and the more Jewish creativity was released, the more Russianized, Polonized, or Lithuanianized the shtetl's residents became. Although comprehensive figures are unavailable, the statistics show that throughout Eastern Europe, the percentage of Jews speaking Yiddish as a first language or at all declined sharply in the interwar years, while the rate of intermarriage, though low by current American standards, steadily rose—two highly accurate gauges of social and cultural assimilation.

It is impossible to know exactly what would have happened to places like Konin and Eisyshok had Polish and Lithuanian Jewry not been destroyed; had they been shielded from the blight of Communism as well, they certainly would have remained more Jewish than the shtetls of the Soviet Union, which by the late 1930's had practically no public Jewish life left. But today, after six more decades of accelerated assimilation, such life would not necessarily have been more intense or ethnically distinctive, let alone characterized by a vigorous Yiddish culture, than small-town Jewish life in contemporary America.

Moreover, not only was there mass overseas emigration from the shtetl in the years before 1914, and not only did this resume (albeit, due to new immigration restrictions, more slowly) after 1918, when it also turned to Palestine, but there was also a population drain to the large cities of Eastern Europe—places like Warsaw, Vilna, Kovno, Lodz, Lvov, Minsk, and (after the Bolshevik Revolution) Moscow, Kiev, and Leningrad—where Jewish communal structures were less encompassing and assimilation greater.

Richmond's statistics for a middle-sized town like Konin show that its Jewish population peaked at about 3,400 in 1883 and declined to some 2,700 on the eve of the Holocaust. (Some of these peo-

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ple, moreover, must have moved to Konin from small villages in the area that were emptying of their Jews even faster.) More dramatically, since the town itself was growing all this time, the proportion of Jews in it dropped from 52 percent to 23 percent. Everything we know about Jewish demography in the modern age tells us that, left to take its course, this trend would have continued.

The new Diasporists have it backward, then, when they urge us not to be misled by the finality of the Holocaust into thinking that the shtetl was historically doomed, since it was after all in its prime at the time of the German invasion. Rather, as an integral, tightly-knit world of secular Yiddishkeit, it *was* doomed by the very forces of modernization that created it in the first place, and that were changing and diminishing it well before the Holocaust. Only the Holocaust's blinding glare permits the illusion that, in its absence, we would see this world still intact before us. What most likely we would have seen in Jewish communities like Konin, Bransk, Eisyshok, Varniai, and Luboml had they survived to this day would be an East-European version of Scranton or Des Moines.

The road from Bychov ran parallel to the Dnieper, which was hidden from sight. At times it was possible to make out far away the low bluffs across the river. We passed fields and forests and an occasional car or wagon but no dwellings.

"My God, it must have been lonely here," said my friend.

Sheep were grazing by a pylon at the entrance to Naybikhov. The village ran along the main road in two rows of painted wood houses, each with one story and two windows facing the street, a triangular attic beneath a gabled tin roof, a picket fence.

I asked Sergei, our driver, to continue to the village's end. When we reached it we drove slowly back, looking for a bench with women on it. In front of every house in rural Ukraine and Belarus is a bench, and on it sometimes sit kerchiefed women, and it was these women we had learned to ask whatever it was we wanted to know.

We found three of them. Although they asked no questions, their scrutiny was intense. Halkin? Galkin? They pronounced the name in both its Belorussian and Russian fashions. No, they had never heard it. Nor did I have any chance of finding my father's house. The village was destroyed in heavy fighting in the war and rebuilt. The Russians were pushed across the river by the first German attack, then counterattacked, then were driven across the river again.

So the man I had met in Israel had been right. Still, Naybikhov did not look rebuilt. It looked old. Its rebuilders had rebuilt it the only way they knew, the way their fathers and grandfathers had built, trimming the wood in the same patterns, painting it the same colors. That was a comfort.

Not enough of one, of course. And yet I had been prepared for this. Given the years since my father's family left, finding any trace of it would have been miraculous. I wandered off to look for a view of the river.

The houses on the hill behind the main street were less brightly painted. Some were plain log cabins like the one my father grew up in. The Dnieper was below. Not the huge river I had seen in Kiev, to which it came swollen by tributaries, it was nonetheless wide, flowing softly between grassy banks.

When I returned to the street, my companions were talking to a heavyset man. He had the florid face of a drinker and smelled like one, although it was not yet noon. Anatoly. Halkin? Galkin? Anatoly had an idea. There was an old man—the oldest in the village—he was ninety-four years old, this old man—and he lived in that house over there—no, that one, the red one with the blue trim. He was the person to ask. If anyone would know, it was he.

It took some banging on his blue window frames to get Mikhail Yosifovich Skobov, who was a bit hard of hearing, to come to his front gate. Once there, however, he stood plumb-line straight, hardly leaning on the cane that he held with the proud, quiet bearing of a man who has shouldered his end of life squarely. A battalion commander in the war. Shaggy eyebrows and high cheekbones like my Uncle Simon's. Halkin? Galkin? He remembered no such family. But in 1914 he was only ten.

Well, that was that, then.

And then I remembered something myself. One of the few things my father had told me about Naybikhov was that the family had a next-door neighbor, a man named Potap. Potap was their *shabbes goy*, the Christian who performed tasks forbidden to Jews on the Sabbath like lighting fires and shoveling snow. He was paid in vodka, and one Sabbath, having drunk more of his pay than usual, he pointed to the large knife that hung on the wall—my father's father was a slaughterer—and said good-naturedly, "You *zhidi* are fine people. Some day I'll take that knife and cut your throats."

That should have been quite enough, it now struck me, to make any small boy melancholic.

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"Potap?" said Mikhail Yosifovich. I had omitted the throat-cutting incident from my account. "A devil of a fellow! I'll show you where his house was."

He took us down a lane to a green hillside overlooking the river. There was no sign it had ever been lived on, no ruins or foundations. "Here." He halted by a circular depression in the ground. "We called this Potap's pond. It was a pool he made."

The river flowed below and disappeared around a bend. Although I did not know if my father's house had been to Potap's left or Potap's right, the scene was just as he had described it. No, not just: the slope to the river, down which two fishermen, a father and his son, were now descending with their poles, was not at all steep. It was gentle and inviting. But that was what a child's memory would have made of it.

Wild flowers grew in the grass. Further on was a hedge of blossoming lilacs.

So this was it. This was where we had come from.

"I've never seen you look so happy," said my friend.

Actually, it seemed to me I had been crying. There was a rusty tin can on the ground. "I'd like a shovel," I said.

Sergei brought a shovel from somebody's yard, and I dug up a bit of gray, sandy soil, roots and all, and filled the can with it. Then I walked to the river.

TWO GOATS were tied to a pole halfway down. They circled one way and then the other as I approached. Nearer the water, in the hushed bliss, a horse cropped grass on a knoll.

By the water's edge, pulled up on the bank, was a rowboat.

I knew that boat. It was Gnessin's.

Uri Nisan Gnessin. Born in Gomel, a rabbi's son. Dead at thirty-two, in 1913, of heart disease. In a novella of his, a man lies at night by the Dnieper, on the hilltop above which some young people have been sitting around a campfire. Now, as they make their way down, one of their voices reminds him of an old love's:

> It was remarkable. What, suddenly, had happened—what had happened to make his heart ache, ache so hotly as once long ago in the frozen glitter of the moon?. . . No one was left on the hilltop; but from the gulley winding down to the water through the blackness between the hills on either side of the river, a murmur of voices reached him. Subdued, it drew near until he made out, assured and daintily affected, that of a woman. . . . There: already at the side of the empty boat that stood waiting on the bank, its crossed oars aslant, she sprang into it. Its sides splashed in the smooth water, splashed and splashed again, the oars knocking in the great silence of the night. Had his soul heard it all in a dream it had dreamed long ago?

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Are Americans Becoming Isolationist?

Aaron L. Friedberg

NOT LONG after Bill Clinton's inauguration in January 1993, his Under Secretary of State, Peter Tarnoff, articulated a new direction for American foreign policy. In the wake of the cold war, Tarnoff argued in an off-the-record briefing with reporters, the United States found itself constrained by large budget deficits and by a public becoming steadily more indifferent to world affairs. No longer, he said, do we have "the leverage, . . . the influence, . . . [or] the inclination to use military force" around the globe; and "we certainly don't have the money." To secure its interests, the U.S. would henceforth have to rely less on its own resources and much more on cooperation with friendly states and on multilateral institutions like the UN.

Tarnoff's presentation ignited a minor furor, with the *Washington Post* noting that the administration's posture might "undercut the perception of U.S. power and authority" and "invite adventures by aggressors around the world." In short order, both Secretary of State Warren Christopher and the White House publicly repudiated his remarks. Nevertheless, the view that Tarnoff was impolitic enough to utter aloud had already become firmly entrenched not only within the Clinton administration but in the liberal foreign-policy establishment at large. According to this new consensus, the fall of the Soviet Union meant that America could at last afford to "come home," reducing its overseas profile and devoting its energies to domestic reforms. Public support for an activist global stance was assumed to be diminishing, making a pullback not only desirable but imperative. And—in a shift that was considered commendable on its own terms—the end of the cold war would permit the United States to cede much of the responsibility for global leadership to international organizations.

Six years have elapsed since Tarnoff enunciated his doctrine, and a decade has passed since America's Communist adversaries began to crumble. Some of the greatest challenges ever to confront the United States have, in fact, disappeared; but new and frightening dangers have arisen. Despite its own early intentions, the Clinton administration has found itself threatening to apply force abroad and has even brought force to bear, if fitfully and with extreme hesitancy.

And what, in the meantime, of American public opinion? The Tarnoff doctrine presupposed that Americans are eager to turn their backs on the world. Is that true, or are they inclined to a more activist role? The answer, it turns out, is anything but simple.

THERE ARE, to begin with, some clear indications that—contrary to the Clinton team's initial diagnosis—the American people are indeed still committed to a policy of global engagement.

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When asked about the role they would like the U.S. to play in the world, solid majorities of roughly two thirds reply that it would be "best for the future of the country if we take an active part" in international affairs. After dipping slightly at the end of the cold war, these numbers are now back to where they were in the mid-1980's.*

A large proportion of Americans also continues to believe in the virtues of a strong defense. In one recent poll, almost three-quarters of those questioned agreed that "because the U.S. has global interests, it is important for the U.S. to maintain a large military with the capacity to project its forces around the world." The same percentage concurred that "it is better to err in the direction of having too much rather than too little defense." In another survey, 39 percent said it was somewhat important for the U.S. to maintain "superior military power worldwide," and another 50 percent said it was very important to do so.

Not only does the public want the U.S. to remain strong and engaged, it tends to be more wary of threats to national security, and more resolute about facing them, than are the country's sometimes giddy elites. In the immediate aftermath of the cold war, for example, large numbers of those whom pollsters label "leaders" or "influentials" wanted to make deep cuts in the defense budget; only about a third of the general public favored such cutbacks, while about half wanted to keep the budget where it was. More recently, elite and mass opinion have begun to converge on this point—at, roughly, the position preferred from the start by the public. Thus, in 1997, nearly half of most elite groups—including academics, scientists, business leaders, congressional staffers, and members of the media—wished to hold military spending constant, as did a majority of the general public.

A similar pattern emerges on a range of other critical issues. In 1991, for example, 40 percent of the public already believed that China might some day come to pose a "critical threat" to the vital interests of the United States, but only 16 percent of "leaders" agreed; by 1995, 57 percent of the public and 46 percent of its leaders foresaw this possibility. Again, although both mass and elite support for sustaining NATO dropped off in the euphoria that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the drop among the elites was much more drastic; by the mid-1990's, majorities in both camps favored maintaining a steady course.

On one key issue in particular the public has tended to be ahead of most of its leaders. Over a third of the general public believes (according to a survey published last year) that the probability of an attack on the United States with weapons of mass destruction is now greater than it was ten years ago, and another third thinks it is about the same. Meanwhile, majorities or large pluralities of most groups of "influentials" judge the threat lower than it once was. But one important subset of influentials—experts directly concerned with security affairs—forms a large exception, with nearly two-thirds perceiving a rising danger. What with the events of the past year—nuclear tests in India and Pakistan, recent revelations about Iraq's ongoing biological- and chemical-weapons program, fresh evidence of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, and the steady proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles—one can expect that the anxieties of the nation's governing classes will soon mirror more closely those of the public.

ON THE big questions of national strategy, then, public opinion would seem to have held remarkably steady over the past decade. Americans want their country to remain strong, and they want it to play a vigorous role in world affairs. Yet in many ways the evidence is much more ambiguous than this simple statement suggests. Recent samplings of opinion do show a high degree of continuity with the past; but they also show signs of an increasing introversion, world-weariness, and even isolationism.

Like most people, Americans prefer to focus their energies and resources on their own affairs. Nations do not usually expend large quantities of treasure and blood, over prolonged periods of time, in the pursuit of abstract ideals or in the defense of other, distant peoples. The extrovert foreign policy pursued by the United States in the cold-war decades marked an exception to this well-nigh universal rule, and it should therefore come as no surprise if, with the demise of the USSR, Americans should yearn to turn inward.

Since the mid-1960's, pollsters have been asking people whether they agree or disagree with the notion that "the U.S. should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own." The numbers of those agreeing with this view shot up sharply dur-

* The data I draw upon in this article are from two successive studies edited by John E. Reilly, *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1991* and *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1995*; a 1997 report from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *America's Place in the World*; and another 1997 study by Steven Kull, I.M. Destler, and Clay Ramsay of the Center for International Studies at the University of Maryland entitled *The Foreign Policy Gap: How Policymakers Misread the Public*.

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ing the drawn-out agony of the Vietnam war, dipped after the aggressive aims of the USSR were made brutally manifest in the late 1970's, and then proceeded to rise again throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's. The upward trend has been especially marked since the close of the cold war. By 1997, fully 39 percent of those questioned said that the United States should "mind its own business," while a bare majority, 54 percent, did not. Summing up these findings, the Pew Research Center recently called isolationism a "large minority sentiment" in the United States.

Other studies echo this conclusion. In the past, ordinary citizens may not have known much about foreign affairs, but they did recognize that what happened in the wider world could affect them. Today, when asked whether events in Western Europe, Asia, or even Canada and Mexico matter to their lives, substantial majorities say "no." By the mid-1990's, for the first time since questions of this nature began to be asked regularly, no foreign-policy issue made it onto the top-ten list of the "biggest problems facing the country today." And when pressed to identify the country's biggest problems in this area, respondents have given answers with a distinctly isolationist tinge: "getting involved in the affairs of other countries," giving away too much foreign aid, and letting in too many illegal immigrants.

Similar answers have been forthcoming when people are asked what the national-security goals of the United States *should* be. Between 1991 and 1995, the fraction of those who believed "defending allies" was a very important objective fell from 61 to 41 percent; also losing ground were the aims of "promoting and defending human rights in other countries" and "protecting weaker nations from aggression." By contrast, Americans now strongly favor such self-protective goals as "stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S." (85 percent), "protecting the jobs of American workers" (83 percent), "preventing the spread of nuclear weapons" (82 percent), and "controlling and reducing illegal immigration" (72 percent). Increasing numbers of Americans, it seems, would like to build high walls around their country's borders in order to shield it from a menacing world.

Finally, there is some, albeit ambiguous, evidence to suggest that ordinary Americans may also share the Clinton administration's favorable opinion of multilateral institutions like the UN as substitutes for American power. For a number of years now, Steven Kull and his colleagues at the University of Maryland have been sampling opinion in this area. They have allegedly discovered that Americans are indeed ready to "move away from the role of dominant world leader" and to "rely more on the other members of a cooperative multilateral system."

As it happens, however, the evidence for this conclusion is less compelling than the authors of the Maryland study contend, being based on some highly freighted questions and formulations. For example, when asked if they want the United States to be "the world's policeman," most Americans, naturally enough, demur; when the alternatives proposed to them are that the U.S. either withdraw from its present commitments altogether or act "primarily on its own," large majorities, again naturally enough, prefer instead that we act "together with allies or through the UN." These two options are, of course, very different. On closer examination, some of what Kull characterizes as a newfound enthusiasm for multilateralism amounts to but a stronger version of the longstanding desire for a more equitable sharing of burdens within existing alliances like NATO. When it comes to the United Nations, to judge from responses to the Maryland pollsters, the prevailing public attitude remains pragmatic and instrumental. The UN is seen primarily as a means for the United States to "move away from its role as world policeman and reduce the burden of its large defense budget," and UN peacekeeping as "a way we can share the burden with other countries."

WHERE, THEN, does the public *really* stand? In light of the second set of data, reflecting a growing introversion, should the first set, indicating a continued desire for American activism, be judged as little more than a reflex left over from the cold war—in other words, inertia? Is isolationism the wave of the future?

More likely, the message of these two contradictory-seeming findings is that, at least for the moment, the American people remain mindful of the world and its claims but, in one way or another, are looking for ways to lighten the load their country has been carrying for over a half-century. One can hardly blame them; the responsibility has been a heavy one indeed. Unfortunately, however, it is profoundly unrealistic to think that the burdens of leadership can be easily shared or cast aside.

America's allies are preoccupied with their own economic and political concerns, and are likely to remain so. In some cases, their interests diverge sharply from ours, and their strategic focus is anyway primarily regional, while ours is by definition global. Multilateral institutions may have their uses,

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but, as has been shown time and time again in the last decade, they are limited, not to say crippled, by their cumbersome bulk and by the conflicting interests of the many states that make them up.

These are obvious points, and yet in recent years scarcely anyone in a position of public authority has troubled to make them. What will happen as it becomes increasingly evident that there really is no one else on the world scene to whom the buck can be passed? Even to ask the question is to bring us back to the role played by the nation's elites in the formation of public perceptions, and in particular to the role played by the President and his advisers.

Clearly it does not help matters that, on most major foreign-policy issues, the actual record of the Clinton administration has wavered between dismal and disastrous. The administration has permitted itself to be thwarted and manipulated by hostile lesser states like Iraq, Iran, Serbia, and North Korea; it has acquiesced in the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan, and it has pushed the Middle East peace process in directions that may yet issue in catastrophe for Israel; it has been slow to respond meaningfully to the growing menace of international terrorism; it has mismanaged relations with most of the world's major powers, including Russia, China, India, and Japan; and it has failed signally in its efforts to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

To this list of failures we must now add another, no less significant. After nearly two terms in office, and despite the occasional rhetorical reference to the United States as the "indispensable nation," neither Bill Clinton nor anyone else on his foreign-policy team has done anything to shore up popular support for a vigorous American role in the world. On the contrary, by encouraging the American people to concentrate exclusively on domestic concerns ("it's the economy, stupid") and to place its faith in multilateralism, the administration has helped set the stage for disillusionment—a disillusionment that may well end by accelerating public pressures for a true global disengagement. A hint of the nation's testiness on this score was on humiliating display last winter at the "town meeting" in Columbus, Ohio, where, before an audience of ordinary Americans (and a handful of Spartacist hecklers), the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Adviser were spectacularly unsuccessful in defending a firm policy toward, of all people, Saddam Hussein.

The benign international situation that existed briefly at the beginning of this decade has already disappeared from view. In the inevitably turbulent years ahead, American global leadership will be more necessary than ever. Sustaining that leadership will require the informed support of the American people, and mobilizing that support will require, in turn, a serious, long-term effort to explain our country's responsibilities as the preeminent global power, and their likely costs. As in so many other areas of our national life, the task of restoration looms dauntingly large; the longer it is delayed, the larger it becomes.

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What the Dead Sea Scrolls Do Not Tell

James Kugel

WHAT IS responsible for the enduring interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls? Ever since news of their discovery began to circulate a half-century ago, an eager public has snapped up any new bit of information about this cache of ancient manuscripts uncovered at Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea. Today, the flow of popular books and articles continues unabated: accounts of the Scrolls' discovery and of the ensuing scholarly controversies about them, overall guides to the manuscripts, translations of the texts themselves, speculations about the ancient Jewish community that owned them, reconstructions of Christian and Jewish history based on them, and, let it be added, a fair amount of nonsense about "suppressed" scrolls (there are none) and the secrets they are alleged to contain.

Certainly, part of this ongoing interest has to do with the fascination that attaches to any significant object from the past. It is one thing to know that a text printed in a book has been handed down and recopied from generation to generation, all the way back to ancient times. It is quite another to hold in one's hand, or even see a photograph of, a Hebrew or Aramaic manuscript actually written by a scribe at the end of the biblical period. Moreover, the very survival of these rolled-up writings has an element of the miraculous about it; were it not for an accident of nature—the fact that they were hidden on the shores of the Dead Sea, the lowest and driest spot on earth—they would have no doubt met the same fate that awaited most other texts written on parchment or papyrus, crumbling into decaying little heaps centuries ago.

But it is the contents of the Scrolls that have most excited the imagination. Here is the library of a peculiar Jewish sect that apparently flourished from the first or second century B.C.E. until the destruction of its desert headquarters by the Roman army in the year 68 of the Common Era, in the final stages of the Jewish revolt against Rome. The Jews of this sect seem to have been at odds with the spiritual ancestors of the Judaism ("rabbinic" Judaism) that has come down to us today; in fact, they were at odds with any Jews other than the members of their own, quirky community. Like Pirate Jenny in Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, they went through life doing their chores while secretly dreaming of the time when "all of *you*"—other Jews outside their group—would be consumed in an outpouring of divine wrath on the Great Day of Revenge.

The Scrolls open a window onto the daily life of this sect, affording a look at the rules by which its members governed their existence, the prayers they prayed and the hymns they sang, the books they studied into the night, the punishments they meted out for various offenses (including inter-

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rupting someone in mid-sentence!), their petty disputes and their dreams for the end-time. All this is indeed fascinating. But the Qumran library contains far more than texts bearing directly on the life of the sect. It also contains manuscripts representing almost every book in the Jewish biblical canon, plus a great many nonbiblical writings originating outside the sect itself—biblical commentaries, visions and apocalypses, psalms, law codes, and still more.

The discovery of almost any one of the major Qumran documents would thus have been an important event—indeed, a scientific breakthrough. Considered together, the texts in this ancient library have to be what they are often called, the greatest archeological find in history.

A NEW book by Hershel Shanks, *The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*,* provides an up-to-date introduction to the story of the Scrolls, retelling the basic facts of their initial discovery (Bedouin shepherd-boy, rock tossed into cave) and the early history of their publication. Shanks also tells about the unwarranted delays in publishing the remaining Scrolls and the international controversy that followed, ending after an interval of four full decades in what he calls their "freeing" from the small editorial cartel that held them in its possession. As the editor and publisher of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Shanks himself played a role in that controversy, editorializing from the pages of his magazine and in various forums on behalf of a movement to take the Scrolls out of the hands of the scholars and make them available to the general public. Toward the end, Shanks actually published some of the Scrolls on his own, an act for which he was sued in a highly-publicized trial in Israel. (He lost, though the judgment is currently under appeal.)

His insider status notwithstanding, Shanks's account of all this contains no startling revelations. Indeed, what he writes about his role in the unauthorized publication of parts of the Scrolls in his own magazine—"I still don't know the source of those photographs"—may strike readers as disingenuous. What I find personally more troubling is his monochromatic portrait of John Strugnell, another figure in the controversy and a man of altogether contradictory impulses. A friend and adviser to a great number of Jewish students and scholars at Harvard, where he taught for many years at the Divinity School, Strugnell was also known to give voice at times to an oddly 4th-century-sounding critique of Judaism. (Christianity has supplanted it, therefore all Jews ought to convert.) On one occasion, he made the mistake of sharing these views with an Israeli reporter come to interview him, and publication of his remarks led to Strugnell's removal as head of the Scrolls team. In Shanks's book, Strugnell comes off as a drunken anti-Semite, which is certainly less than the whole truth.

Shanks is at his best in sorting through the evidence concerning the nature of Qumran as an archeological site. What *do* we know about the purpose of the structures unearthed there? In seeking to answer that question, Shanks surveys the scholarly literature in measured tones, pointing out some of the unjustified assumptions of early researchers. While not a scholar himself, he has the journalist's knack of asking hard questions of those who are, and of not being satisfied with fuzzy answers.

One theory, championed by Norman Golb of the University of Chicago (and others), holds that the structures excavated at Qumran had nothing to do with the Scrolls found in the nearby caves. Those Scrolls, Golb argues, were a library brought from Jerusalem and hidden in the caves as a temporary expediency. Whoever their owners were, there was no relationship between them and the inhabitants of the nearby buildings, who may not have been a religious community at all.

Most scholars reject this view, but at least part of Golb's point is more broadly conceded. Since, after all, the library found at Qumran was quite large and diverse, there is no reason to insist that each and every manuscript had always been in the community's possession. It is certainly possible that, in the difficult days preceding the all-out Jewish revolt against Rome, adherents of the same Jewish sect as the one living at Qumran may have arrived from elsewhere with additional books to be deposited for safe-keeping. In any case, precisely because it is a library, the Qumran collection includes many items originally written elsewhere and composed by authors who had nothing to do with the sect. Only a handful are what one researcher terms "sectually explicit," that is, referring to practices characteristic of the sect itself or in some other way identifying themselves as products of the sectarian community.

Shanks ultimately comes down on the side of those who hold that the Qumran settlement was indeed that of a religious community, probably part of the same group known to us from contemporaneous sources as the Essenes. But he also argues that the library, because of its great size, must have

* Random House, 384 pp., $25.00.

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come from elsewhere. This last assertion will strike many as extreme. What were all those inkwells doing among the ruins of Qumran? Would a group of religious Jews living there have been entirely without a library? It seems almost indisputable that at least part of the collection found adjacent to the religious settlement had been used by its members; and some of the manuscripts were certainly copied there.

A FEW questionable assertions aside, Shanks's book provides a good overview, though I think readers would have been better served if he had given them more of the Scrolls themselves, to capture their flavor. Although Shanks quotes here and there from the texts, readers will not come away with a feeling either for the individual documents or for the spiritual world of the Qumran community. True, there are other books that present only that—including two excellent recent collections of the texts in translation*—and there will certainly be more on the way. But without such a feeling, a reader may have difficulty understanding what all the fuss has been about.

Although a half-century has passed since the Scrolls were discovered, their real contribution to our knowledge of history—and the history of Judaism in particular—is only now starting to come into focus. Shanks's book has little to say about some of the ironies that have characterized the Scrolls' career, but ironies there are, particularly when one considers the whole of these 50 years of research.

When the Scrolls were first discovered, they seemed destined to fill in the blanks of history—to tell us what we did not know about their overall period and cultural context. After all, they were written just before the time of the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, and they also straddled the no less crucial period of the very beginnings of Christianity. Surely the road to a proper understanding of these developments—in other words, to a proper understanding of where today's Judaism and Christianity really come from—would have to pass through Qumran.

From this standpoint, the Scrolls, although they have helped fill in *some* blanks, have also turned out to be a disappointment. In the case of rabbinic Judaism, texts like the so-called "Halakhic Letter" have indeed provided useful and concrete evidence that revises long-held assumptions. Many historians, picking up on a remark by the 1st-century Jewish writer Josephus, believed that in those ancient times, what divided Jews into different groups—Pharisees, Sadducees, and so forth— was principally disagreement over matters of belief like predestination, the immortality of the soul, and similar items. The Halakhic Letter and other texts suggest that, to the contrary, the main items in dispute were the nitty-gritty details involved in the observance of Jewish law. In supplying some of the details of these disputed practices, the Qumran texts also confirm the accounts of legal controversies preserved in the centuries-later Babylonian Talmud and other rabbinic sources.

Yet balancing such gains are many very significant questions about Second Temple Judaism that the Scrolls themselves raise but fail to answer. We still do not have, and probably never will have, a clear picture of how the competing groups within Judaism actually developed—an issue now complicated by uncertainty about the Dead Sea Scrolls community itself. Was it indeed, as many scholars have long maintained, part of the Essenes? Or was it, as other scholars have recently urged, affiliated with the Sadducees? Or the Boethusians? Were its members celibate monks, or married householders—or were there some of each? If the very identity of the Scrolls' proprietors and the nature of their group are unclear in such fundamental details, it will not be easy to use them as a basis on which to write an overall history of the Judaism of that era.

When it comes to casting light on Christian origins, the promise of the Scrolls seemed at first even greater than in the case of rabbinic Judaism. The oldest of these writings antedate the beginnings of Christianity as a movement, while the latest date from the organizational inception of the Church. For a modern-day scholar, here were writings composed by Jesus' own contemporaries—perhaps, in some cases, by people who knew him personally and followed with excitement the very events recounted in the Gospels.

But as great as the promise seemed, the disappointment has been still greater. Despite some early and altogether unjustified optimism, none of the Scrolls has turned up any direct connection with early Christianity. To be sure, there are passages suggesting that some of the early followers of Jesus may have had some familiarity with the legal practices and other characteristics of the Qumran community. Moreover, the thought and demeanor of the New Testament figure of John the Baptist bear a striking resemblance to what we read in the

* F. Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Brill, 1994); G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Penguin, 1997).

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Scrolls about the Qumran group, and it is conceivable that he may actually have been a dropout from that community. But all this is speculative, and in any case offers no information bearing directly on Christianity's founder or on any of the specific events recounted in the Gospels or other early Christian documents.

BALANCING THESE large disappointments, however, is another irony surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls, this one of a more positive nature. Fifty years after their discovery, one of their principal contributions turns out to have been their capacity to make scholars aware of the value of materials *other* than the Scrolls: texts that lay within plain sight for decades—nay, centuries—but which for one reason or another had been neglected or ignored.

This is true even for the Bible itself. Prior to the discovery of the Qumran trove, the oldest surviving Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible dated from medieval times. This made it difficult to speculate about what earlier stages of the biblical text might have looked like. One piece of evidence that did exist was the old Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint, parts of which date back to the 3rd century B.C.E. This translation differs from the traditional Hebrew text in many details—ranging from a missing or added letter here and there to whole chapters that have been added, deleted, or rearranged. But to most readers over the ages, these differences were of little account; their Bible was based, either directly or via translation, on the traditional Hebrew text as it had been preserved and transmitted. For centuries, the few people aware of the discrepancies had chalked them up to sloppiness on the part of the Septuagint translators.

Interest in the Septuagint and the early history of the biblical text did begin to pick up even before the Scrolls' discovery—but slowly. Once scholars found themselves in possession of actual manuscripts in Hebrew going back to antiquity, however, the whole attitude toward the Septuagint had to change. The Dead Sea Scrolls offer up a striking picture of the Bible. While some of the manuscripts are amazingly similar to the traditional Jewish text, others more closely resemble the Septuagint or other ancient versions. The point was thus driven home that the Septuagint is not a sloppy translation of the same Hebrew text that had been faithfully preserved by Jews; it is an accurate translation of a different *form* of the Hebrew text, a form preserved here and there in the Qumran library. In light of the Scrolls, both the Septuagint and other ancient textual witnesses—most of which had been hanging around for centuries—have come to be more fully appreciated for what they are: a valuable snapshot of the Hebrew Bible from a period when there apparently was no single authorized text and when different "editions" of biblical books still circulated freely.

Still another area illuminated by the Scrolls is ancient Jewish writings outside the Bible. The latest parts of the Hebrew Bible probably date from the 2nd century B.C.E. After that, the traditional Jewish library jumps forward four centuries to the earliest documents of the rabbinic period—the Mishnah, Tosefta, and other texts, all thought to have been put in final form around 200 C.E. or shortly thereafter. But Jews certainly did not stop writing during those "missing" 400 years. Indeed, scholars have long been aware of a small library of texts that survived from this period, written for the most part in Hebrew and Aramaic but preserved in other languages after those two fell into disuse among Jews.

Early Christians, who considered these books sacred, kept them alive in translation; many survived in Greek, others in Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, or Slavonic. Some, like the books of Tobit and Judith, were incorporated into the Christian canon and transmitted with other biblical books from generation to generation; they may be found in ordinary Christian Bibles today (under the headings of "Old Testament Apocrypha" or "Deuterocanonical Works"). But others, with names like Jubilees, The Apocalypse of Abraham, and The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, largely fell into obscurity, preserved here and there in a dusty monastery or saved on a single palimpsest in the Vatican library.

In the decades before the Scrolls' discovery, some scholars had busied themselves with this body of Jewish writings—called, from a Christian perspective, "intertestamental" literature. But it was the discovery of the Scrolls themselves, which included fragments of the long-lost original versions of Enoch, Jubilees, and The Testaments, that truly awakened interest in these fascinating treasures long within easy reach.

WHAT THE Scrolls provide—dramatically—is a context for this literature. "It is for Jews like us," the Scrolls' copyists seem to be saying, "that these books were originally written." Indeed, the Scrolls make it clear that for members of the Qumran community, some such books were part of sacred Scripture. Among other things, the commu-

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nity apparently lived according to the basic calendar prescribed by the book of Jubilees—a calendar based not on lunar months, as the present-day Jewish calendar is, but on a fixed number of days (364) per year divided into twelve units, months whose beginnings and ends had no connection with the phases of the moon.

Jubilees itself provides a fascinating glimpse into Judaism at the start of the 2nd century B.C.E. The author of this book was something of a genius at commenting on and interpreting earlier passages in the Bible; his brilliant insights and innovative solutions to biblical quandaries would not find their equal until the more systematic commentaries of medieval Jewish scholars. But he was also a man of strong opinions on the issues of his day, and he did not shrink from using Scripture to argue his side.

In common with many Jews of his time, the author of Jubilees was doggedly chauvinistic and felt that any contact with foreigners was corrupting. He in fact believed that Jews were a species apart from the rest of humanity, an angelic race—and he could prove it from the Torah! Therefore, intermarriage between Jew and Gentile was not only forbidden but monstrous and punishable by death—and he could prove *that* from the Torah, too. Seeing his own contemporaries as the victims of a long moral slide, he took it as his personal mission to return them to the right path. Above all, he never tired of repeating his list of their three great sins: fornication, impurity, . . . and the use of the wrong calendar.

The existence of Jubilees had been known from antiquity, though in the West the text itself largely dropped out of sight until the 19th century, when the Ethiopic translation made its way to Europe and, shortly thereafter, a substantial chunk was discovered in Latin in the Vatican. But only since the discovery of the Scrolls have scholars begun to devote to Jubilees, and other texts of that period, the attention they deserve. For in such books, truly, may lie the answers to fundamental questions the Scrolls themselves fail to answer concerning the evolution of Judaism from the end of the biblical period until the Mishnah.

Before the Dead Sea Scrolls, it was the pleasure of some modern scholars to argue that traditional Jewish texts like the Mishnah, whatever they might be able to tell us about Jewish ideas at the time of their codification, were otherwise of limited historical value. In particular, little of what they had to say about Jewish life *before* the time of their own final composition or editing could be trusted. According to this view, for example, the Mishnah's picture of ritual practices in the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E., was largely a nostalgic reverie, just as rabbinic traditions alleged to stretch back to before the Common Era were probably pure invention.

Such a wholesale characterization is now untenable, for the Scrolls have afforded historians a set of specifics that jibe with things reported in rabbinic literature. This in turn has given scholars a new respect for the reliability of rabbinic texts in other connections as well, including as attestations to the antiquity of various exegetical traditions.

For example, the Mishnah asserts, without detailing them, that the patriarch Abraham underwent ten divinely instituted tests in his life. But there is no such assertion in the Bible, and one might well conclude that the notion of ten tests is no older than the Mishnah itself, that is, the 2nd century C.E.—a time when the idea of God's testing His chosen servants might be particularly attractive to Jewish homilists. But it turns out that the Mishnah was hardly inventing something for its own age; the same tradition of Abraham's ten tests is found 400 years earlier, in the book of Jubilees.

IN SHORT, even if the more sweeping expectations of an earlier day have proved to be misplaced, the Dead Sea Scrolls have indeed inaugurated a reshaping of our ideas about ancient Judaism and Christianity. But that reshaping uses the Scrolls' material in often subtle and indirect ways, relying not so much on revelations found in the Scrolls themselves as on the new context they have provided—plus more than a few tantalizing hints here and there that have sent scholars scurrying back to texts that have been around for some time. Now that the last unpublished Scrolls are making their way into print, this reshaping is likely only to accelerate, to the benefit of our knowledge of subjects previously neglected or long misunderstood.

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OBSERVATIONS

The Professor's Lament

Carol Iannone

IT IS hardly news that these are unhappy times for the American professor. Thanks to a combination of factors—tighter university budgets, deferred retirements, the demands of affirmative action—good jobs have all but dried up in many academic fields. Colleges increasingly staff their classrooms by drawing on a poorly-compensated proletariat of "adjuncts": hapless Ph.D.'s who have not yet given up on the possibility of securing a full-time position, or even a coveted tenure-track post.

Of late, a new grievance has been added to the list. As one educator recently lamented in the *Christian Science Monitor*, colleges these days have become "youth resorts," complete with "pools, hockey rinks, catered meals, student centers, [and] television rooms." Worse, complains another in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, our institutions of higher learning are more eager to please students than to instruct them. Because of a new emphasis on student-friendly pedagogy, the professor has become "a congenial traffic officer, . . . a 'guide on the side' rather than a 'sage on the stage.'" As the *New York Times* reported earlier this year, the signs of this trend include not only grade inflation—of Weimar-like proportions—but the growing importance of student evaluations in assessing professors for retention and promotion.

On many American campuses, it would now seem, the kids are in charge. But this is no accident. "Democratizing" the university was, after all, a chief aim of the campus protests of the 1960's, led in many instances by the same men and women who today constitute the professoriate. And it is also no surprise that, faced with the unpleasant consequences of their youthful desires, some of these tenured radicals should now be having second thoughts. Unfortunately, these second thoughts stop far short of where they should lead.

A PRIME example of the phenomenon I have in mind is an extraordinarily revealing article by Mark Edmundson, a professor of English at the University of Virginia, which appeared late last year in *Harper's*. Disturbed by his most recent experience with the anonymous, standardized evaluation forms that his students fill out at the end of each semester, Edmundson writes with soul-baring candor about the state of his profession and liberal-arts education in general.

It is not that Edmundson himself fears bad evaluations. On the contrary, he assures us, he knows that once his students have finished rating him on a scale of 1 to 5 and scribbled some remarks about his abilities in various categories, he will find yet again that, by their standards, he is a success: his course will be commended as "enjoyable," and he will be praised for being "interesting," for his "relaxed and tolerant ways," for his "sense of humor and capacity to connect the arcana of the subject matter with current culture."

Indeed, it is this very success that distresses him, smacking as it does of "calm consumer expertise" on their side, salesmanship and hucksterism on his. The very forms on which his students register their reactions are "reminiscent of the

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sheets circulated after the TV pilot has just played to its sample audience in Burbank." They reflect the "serene belief" that the function of a teacher, not to mention the function of what he teaches, is "to divert, entertain, and interest."

This "ethos of consumerism," Edmundson argues, pervades the contemporary university, where faculty and administration relations with students are invariably conducted in "a solicitous, nearly servile tone." Before they are even admitted as freshmen, students are "flooded with advertising, pictures, testimonials, videocassettes, CD-ROM's," all designed to lure them to campus. Once safely enrolled, they are kept satisfied by permissive grading (especially in the humanities), easy requirements for majors, and the option of withdrawing from a class well after the semester has begun. Students are "shocked," says Edmundson, "if their professors don't reflexively suck up to them."

The result has been to create an academic Lake Wobegone, a place, Edmundson writes, "where almost no one fail[s], everything [is] enjoyable, and everyone [is] nice." The only thing lost amid all this complacency is "an education that matters."

AND WHAT has brought us to this pass? Demography, Edmundson avers, bears some of the blame. Having expanded to accommodate the postwar baby boom, universities now find themselves in fierce competition to attract the members of a smaller college-age population; as a consequence, today's students are buyers in a buyer's market.

The chief culprit, however, is not demography but "American culture writ large"—a culture that has become "ever more devoted to consumption and entertainment, to the using and using up of goods and images." Edmundson admits that the capitalist system is not the only factor at work here. Some responsibility also falls on the radicals of his own 1960's generation, whose idealistic search for pleasure and gratification devolved into a mere quest for commodities, thus stoking the very system they so ardently wished to overturn.

What is clearly *not* at fault for the crisis of liberal-arts education, in Edmundson's view, is the "democratization" the radicals of the 60's brought to student-faculty relations—something he does not even so much as mention. He does, however, discuss another related development that also came in with the 1960's and their aftermath: the "peculiar ideas" that travel under the banners of multiculturalism, deconstruction, feminism, and queer theory. Indeed, Edmundson is himself among the promoters of these new ideas, having edited a collection of essays, *Wild Orchids and Trotsky* (1993), intended to showcase outstanding examples of just such cutting-edge scholarship.

Edmundson concedes that many of the new theories have been taken too far and have had a leveling effect both on learning itself and on students' attitudes toward the educational enterprise. Multiculturalism has degenerated into uncritical ethnic celebration. So-called "cultural studies" have brought the tawdriest effusions of popular culture into the classroom. And thanks to deconstruction, students of literature have been turned into "sophisticated debunkers," rejecting all claims of greatness and genius. Still, he hastens to conclude, these unfortunate developments are not the real source of the problem. "It's not that a left-wing professorial coup has taken over the university," he writes. Rather, on American campuses "left-liberal politics have collided with the ethos of consumerism," and the "consumer ethos is winning."

FOR ANYONE with experience in today's colleges, much in Edmundson's account will strike a deep chord of recognition. Consumerism *has* become the controlling ethos of the university, and he captures its spirit with vulgar precision when he says that professors have had to learn "never to piss the customers off."

And yet customers and the consumer mentality were not invented yesterday; they have always been with us, and so have those who decry their effects on the human spirit. To go back no farther than the late 40's and early 50's, works like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *The Lonely Crowd* warned Americans that they were in danger of losing their souls to things and goods, to status and acquisition. In those days, however, the universities somehow remained largely untouched by what Carlyle called the culture of "profit and loss," managing for the most part to form a refuge for pursuing the life of the mind.

Edmundson himself provides a glimpse of these institutions as they once were, recalling with fondness the no-nonsense college catalogues he perused as a high-schooler, with their implicit and unapologetic assumption that the university operated on teachers' terms. Those teachers believed, not without reason, that they were introducing students to what was best and most lasting in their cultural tradition, works that embodied such truth and beauty as human beings are capable of approximating. Instruction in this tradition was regarded as both morally and intellectually edifying—as well as a necessary prerequisite to testing, challenging, and refining what had been handed down over the generations.

But this is—precisely—the understanding of liberal education that students were rebelling against in the 1960's when they demanded a curriculum more "relevant" to their own experience, an experience they understood to consist by and large of oppression at the hands of authority. The old books—the "canon"—were part and parcel of that authority. Only by casting them aside, or by learning to read them

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through the lens of the new, liberationist credos, could one begin to call oneself educated. In the course of the 1970's, with the arrival at American universities of various pseudo-sophisticated theories imported from France and Germany, the slogans of the 1960's became transformed into the now-familiar vocabulary of the undergraduate seminar: Eurocentrism, logocentrism, phallocentrism, marginality, alterity, hegemony, indeterminacy, and all the rest. Today it is commonplace in the humanities to hear morality, language, even reason itself dismissed as tools of elite privilege, while the word truth is almost universally consigned to question-begging quotation marks.

In the classroom, this revolution has had predictable consequences. Taught that there are no truths above them, and no timeless works with which they must be acquainted, students now simply search for what pleases, much as they might at the local shopping mall. Since nothing is or can be defended as priceless, everything has its price, and sooner or later, everything goes on sale.

Edmundson, invoking a favored shibboleth of today's academic radicals, lamely proposes that today's teachers learn to "subvert" the new consumerist attitudes of their students. That is hardly likely to happen unless teachers have something to fill the void, unless they can direct students to books and thinkers whom they firmly believe to be intrinsically worthy of attention, and unless they are prepared to defend that belief. Until that day arrives, students will go on playing the role that has been assigned to them by their elders, including professors like Mark Edmundson who are frank enough to acknowledge the wasteland they inhabit but cannot bring themselves to repudiate the ideas—their ideas—that have so plainly brought it about.

MUSIC

Brand-Name Opera

Terry Teachout

ANDRÉ PREVIN's operatic version of the Tennessee Williams play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, received its premiere in September by the San Francisco Opera in one of the most widely noticed classical-music events of recent years. Critics from around the world covered the opening-night performance, and the production, which starred the much-admired American soprano Renée Fleming in the role of Blanche Du Bois, was recorded live by Deutsche Grammophon for release on CD and videotaped for later telecast by PBS.*

It stands to reason that Previn's first opera should have received such attention, not merely on account of his celebrity—he is one of the few classical musicians whose name is known to the public at large—but also because opera in America has lately entered a period of unprecedented popularity. Attendance, stimulated by the general adoption of English-language super- titles and the mass-market success of singers like Luciano Pavarotti and Cecilia Bartoli, has risen 34 percent since 1980, and several American operas composed in the last decade, among them John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer*, John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Anthony Davis's *Amistad*, Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*, Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons*, and Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk*, have attracted media coverage not unlike that showered on *A Streetcar Named Desire*. All these operas were pro-

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* One aria from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche's "I want magic!," was recorded in advance of the premiere by Fleming with James Levine and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and is now available on *I Want Magic!: American Opera Arias* (London 289 460 567-2LH).

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duced by major American houses; most were telecast by PBS; and several have been recorded commercially.

Yet despite the initial receptivity of audiences, none of these operas as yet shows any sign of entering the standard repertory, whether in America or abroad. To judge by the mostly tepid reviews of its premiere, moreover, *Streetcar* is unlikely to break the pattern. American operagoers, it seems, are willing to give new works the benefit of the doubt, especially if the casts are stellar and the productions sufficiently expensive-looking, but a single viewing usually proves sufficient to slake their curiosity. Though every opera is a case unto itself, in important ways *A Streetcar Named Desire* exemplifies the underlying reasons why this should be so.

FIFTY-ONE YEARS after it opened on Broadway, *A Streetcar Named Desire* remains one of the most frequently produced plays of the 20th century—it is still well-known enough, for instance, to have been parodied on *The Simpsons*—and the 1951 film version, directed by Elia Kazan and starring Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando, continues to be shown regularly on TV.* As a result, most literate Americans know the story of Blanche Du Bois, the impoverished Southern belle who comes to New Orleans to live with her sister Stella, runs afoul of Stanley Kowalski, Stella's brutish husband, and ends up in an insane asylum, having proved incapable of reconciling her fantasies of gentility with the coarse realities of working-class life.

Because the play is so famous—and because the Williams estate required him to do so—Philip Littell, the librettist, stuck closely both to its broad structural outlines and to its verbal essence. "The trick," Littell has said, "is to make [the audience] think, 'Why'd they hire a librettist?'" In this he has succeeded; despite extensive cuts and countless small textual changes, anyone who has seen the play will find Littell's libretto to be impressively true to its spirit.

But to turn a famous piece of literature into an effective opera libretto entails far more than merely compressing the original text. Every great opera based on a familiar literary source involves an imaginative transformation of the original, one that typically goes far beyond the setting of old words to new music. In Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*, Shakespeare's English words are freely translated into the Italian of Arrigo Boito; in Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeny Onegin*, Alexander Pushkin's verse novel is opened up into a series of "lyrical scenes"; in Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James's narrative voice is jettisoned in favor of dialogue, almost none of which appears in the original novella.

In the absence of such a transformation, one is almost inevitably left with an impression of mere tautology; and that is the case with *Streetcar*. Lotfi Mansouri, the general director of the San Francisco Opera, had long wanted to turn Williams's play into an opera, and approached several composers before settling on Previn. "I cornered Stephen Sondheim," he has recalled, "and he said, 'Oh, it's such a good play—it doesn't need music.' Well, you can say that about Shakespeare's *Othello* too." But Boito's *Otello* is a good libretto precisely because it is so *different* from Shakespeare's *Othello*. By contrast, Littell's *Streetcar* is so much like the original play that it is difficult at first glance to see why André Previn felt the need to set it to music.

As it happens, Previn's own answer to this question bespeaks a similar misunderstanding of operatic dramaturgy: "I always thought [*Streetcar*] was an opera that was just missing the music, with all the excesses of lust and madness in the plot." In fact, many opera libretti are melodramatic to a fault. But this is not because "excesses of lust and madness" are somehow intrinsic to opera—a notion that would have surprised Mozart. Rather, it is the nature of lyric theater that the underlying dramatic premises of an opera must be immediately intelligible to an audience.

It takes far longer to sing a sentence than to speak it. For this reason, opera libretti cannot rely on lengthy exposition but instead must go directly to the point; subtlety in opera is a function not of the words but of the music. Hence the need for boldly drawn yet believable characters, caught up in clear-cut dramatic situations that require prompt resolution. Yet as a play, *Streetcar*, far from being immediately intelligible, is full of decidedly peculiar people who fail to ring true. The only exception is the character of Blanche, whose very name has become a universally recognized symbol of feminine self-deception.

In the end, *Streetcar* is an "operatic" play only in the limited sense that its language is poetic to the point of overripeness. But in a libretto, language *per se* is the least important thing. Some libretti are elegantly wrought, others baldly functional, but no normal listener, even in the age of supertitles, attends more than casually to the *verbal* music of an opera. To say it again, great operas are not about words and music but about situations and music—and the music comes first.

MUSIC IS so central to the effect of opera that it can justify even the most contorted dramaturgy. Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, Wagner's *Gotterdämmerung*, Tchaikovsky's *Onegin*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*: all these works pose theatrical problems of one kind or another, but all are

*One of the most impressive features of the film of *Streetcar* is the score by Alex North. Among the first by a Hollywood composer to make idiomatic use of jazz, it creates and sustains a sultry, threatening atmosphere of sexual obsession. The original soundtrack, now available on CD, remains a landmark in the history of film music (Capitol CDP 7 95597 2).

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readily acknowledged as operatic masterpieces because of the powerful individuality of their musical content. Unlike them, Previn's score for *A Streetcar Named Desire*, though polished and accessible, is eclectic to the point of facelessness; by turns frankly romantic, mildly dissonant, and explicitly jazzy, it moves so freely from style to style that no personal voice emerges.

No doubt this has much to do with the fact that Previn spent his younger years working as a staff composer for MGM, where he scored a wide variety of films, among them *Elmer Gantry* and *Bad Day at Black Rock*, and served as music director for popular musical comedies like *Gigi* and *My Fair Lady*. Composers of film music not infrequently acquire a chameleon-like ability to change styles at will, and though Previn's virtuosity and professionalism were justly admired by his Hollywood colleagues, he never developed the kind of recognizable signature style heard in the scores of such renowned film composers as Bernard Herrmann and Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

Previn later turned his back on the movie industry, writing with witty contempt of its lack of culture in his 1991 memoir, *No Minor Chords: My Days in Hollywood*. On many occasions he has complained about the initial reluctance of the classical-music establishment to take him seriously. "I would have been more readily forgiven for being the Boston Strangler," he has said, "than for having written a film score." All the more ironic, then, that *Streetcar* so clearly betrays his training. In much the same way that film composers "underscore" dialogue, Previn keeps the text well to the fore at all times; the overall impression one carries away is of overlong stretches of tonal but tuneless *arioso* supported by an orchestral commentary strangely devoid of independent musical life. Even the arias—nearly all of them for Blanche—are melodically unmemorable. No less ironically, the jazzy passages of *A Streetcar Named Desire* are bland and unidiomatic, giving no hint that they are the work of a highly gifted jazz pianist.

Most troubling of all is Previn's singular inability to come to grips, musically, with the character of Stanley Kowalski. Granted, it is by definition difficult to write music for an inarticulate man—still another reason why *Streetcar* is a dubious subject for operatic adaptation—but Previn's elegantly scored music fails altogether to suggest the character's crude sensuality. A case in point is the scene in which Stanley, angered by the fact that Blanche has mysteriously squandered her sister's inheritance, reminds Stella: "In the state of Louisiana, we have what is known as the Napoleonic Code. . . . What that *means* is what belongs to you belongs to me and vicey-versa." Spoken by Marlon Brando in the film of *Streetcar*, these words instantaneously convey Stanley's swaggering, semiliterate belligerence; as sung in Previn's setting by the baritone Rodney Gilfry, they evoke, rather, a prissy solicitor warning his stubborn client of the perils of defalcation.

That Previn's score has turned out to be a major disappointment, however, should have surprised no one. A fine orchestral conductor as well as an outstanding piano soloist and accompanist, he has spent little of his performing career in the opera house. As a composer, although he has written effective occasional pieces for such artists as the sopranos Kathleen Battle and Barbara Bonney, the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and the pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, this was his very first venture into opera. Previn is now sixty-nine; virtually all repertory operas are the work of musicians who began writing for the stage at a comparatively early age—usually in their twenties—and who either specialized in opera (like Verdi and Wagner) or (like Mozart and Britten) devoted a substantial portion of their composing lives to it. The chances that a part-time composer would have succeeded in setting so problematic a libretto on his first try were therefore slim at best.

GIVEN ALL this, one inevitably wonders what possessed the San Francisco Opera to commission an operatic version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the first place, or to ask André Previn to write the score. For as I have already indicated, the opera was not Previn's idea at all, but rather that of Lotfi Mansouri, the company's general director.

That *Streetcar* was conceived not by a composer but by an impresario is wholly characteristic of today's media-driven classical-music culture. Indeed, to nothing does the making of *Streetcar* bear so great a resemblance as to a modern-day film-studio deal. Mansouri, the producer, acquired the rights to a road-tested vehicle for a world-famous female star, hired Previn and Littell as the writers and Colin Graham as the director, then pitched the idea to Renée Fleming. No matter that the original property was clearly unsuitable for operatic adaptation, or that Previn was just as clearly the wrong choice as composer. The presence on the marquee of three highly marketable brand names—Renée Fleming, in André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire!*—guaranteed a pre-sold audience whether or not the finished product was any good.

To be sure, Mansouri did not invent the brand-name approach to opera. Its imprint can be found on most of the new American operas that have attracted significant media attention in recent years. *The Death of Klinghoffer*, for example, dealt with a well-known news story of the recent past, while *Harvey Milk* and *Amistad* were politically-correct historical passion plays. But Mansouri has done much to perfect the formula. Witness his first commission for the San Francisco Opera, Conrad Susa's *The*

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Dangerous Liaisons. An adaptation of Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangéreuses*, the celebrated 18th-century epistolary novel that had recently been made into a successful play and a popular movie, *The Dangerous Liaisons* starred Fleming, Frederica von Stade, and Thomas Hampson, three of the biggest names in opera. The only thing missing was an equally famous composer, a flaw Mansouri hastened to correct with *Streetcar*.

There can be little doubt that more such operas will be produced in the near future, both by the San Francisco Opera—it has already announced its next major commission, an adaptation by Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally of Sister Helen Prejean's best-selling book, *Dead Man Walking*, the film version of which starred Sean Penn and Susan Sarandon—and by other, similarly inclined companies. John Harbison is currently composing *The Great Gatsby* for the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the possibilities are all but endless. "I'm a populist," Mansouri has said. "I want to prove opera is for everyone, and I pick subjects with that in mind." Why not *Gone With the Wind*? *The Silence of the Lambs*? *Titanic*?

It is, of course, dangerously easy to make fun of the desire to bring opera to a wider audience—dangerous precisely because there is nothing intrinsically "elitist" about the great repertory operas. Masterpieces like *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Carmen*, and *Tosca*—all of them, incidentally, adapted from once-famous literary sources—were deliberately designed to speak to the widest possible audience, and continue to do so to this day. The fact that a growing number of contemporary composers (and even producers) now seek to do the same thing is not contemptible but admirable. "I didn't want twelve-tone," Mansouri has said of *Streetcar*. "I wanted a gorgeous piece of music theater, accessible but not tacky, written for an audience, not academia." Musically speaking, what could be more desirable?

Unfortunately, brand-name opera is noteworthy above all for its lack of musical distinction. In this, it resembles such recent Broadway shows as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, and *The Lion King*, little more than grandiose visual spectacles accompanied by innocuous music. At the same time, it also recalls the lavishly produced five-act historical pageants put on by the Paris Opera in the 19th century, grand operas like Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* and Auber's *La Muette de Portici* that were once as popular as *Miss Saigon*. Now they are forgotten, not because their librettos are dated but because their scores are dull.

And therein lies the fatal flaw in Lotfi Mansouri's recipe. Impresarios do not write opera, composers do. The San Francisco Opera made every effort to bring André Previn's score to life: Colin Graham's direction was admirably straightforward, Michael Yeargan's sets were wonderfully vivid, and the excellent cast, especially Fleming and Elizabeth Futral as Stella, performed with skill and conviction. But while a truly brilliant musical genius could perhaps have risen to so auspicious, amply funded, and deeply problematic an occasion, Mansouri perversely chose to entrust the central element of *A Streetcar Named Desire* to a weekend composer whose chief credential was his celebrity. It is hard to imagine a more telling metaphor for the condition of American high culture in the age of the media event.

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Books in Review

No Free Ride

The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages
by Tom Bethell
St. Martin's. 378 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
Richard Pipes

SINCE THE collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent retreat of both Communism and socialism, scholars have shown an increased interest in identifying the factors responsible for the dynamism of Western economies. In the past, what used to be stressed was the role of religion, especially Judaism and Calvinism. Today, it is more common to emphasize culture and technological innovation, as David Landes does in his recent *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*. But other economic historians, most notably Douglass North, point first and foremost to private property, which, while not an institution unique to the West, has attained here its fullest development.

Property contributes to economic growth in several ways.

Some 2,500 years ago, Aristotle observed that, contrary to the theories of his teacher Plato, common ownership of assets not only fails to eliminate but exacerbates social friction. He further noted that people take better care of objects they own than those that are public property. These observations are readily confirmed.

They are also supported by the findings of economic historians who have demonstrated, both theoretically and from case studies, that natural assets owned collectively or by no one are liable to be overexploited to the point of exhaustion, as very nearly happened in this century with some forms of marine life. Conventional pieties notwithstanding, pre-modern peoples do not show reverence for their environment: the extinction of certain large mammals has been plausibly attributed to overhunting by pre-agricultural man, while the sudden decline of Mayan civilization is believed to have been caused by the mindless destruction of forests. Another drawback of ownerless resources is the phenomenon of the "free rider," the member of the community who benefits from the work of his neighbors without contributing his share; this was the major reason the Plymouth Colony had to abandon its original communism and privatize the land.

Among the economic benefits of private property is the opportunity it gives to those living in a capitalist society to obtain credit by pledging their belongings as collateral. In Peru, as the economist Hernando de Soto has shown, conditions improved dramatically after people were given legal title to their own land and business enterprises. And the benefits of ownership are not limited to the economic sphere alone; they are political as well, being linked to freedom and the rule of law.

And yet many Western scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge these facts. In part, this may be a function of familiarity. Private property and the rights that go with it

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have been an intrinsic aspect of Western civilization for such a long time that they are easily ignored or taken for granted. But there is also an active bias at work in the social sciences, many of whose practitioners have adopted the view—not always consciously—that property is a transient institution, a kind of interlude between the (mythical) "primitive Communism" of the prehistoric past and the (imaginary) advanced collectivism of the future.

Whatever the reason, one would search hard to find in Western historical, political, and economic thought an awareness of property's importance. As Tom Bethell notes in his new book, *The Noblest Triumph*:

> In the 1950's, when the Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. published its *Great Books of the Western World*, property was not among the 102 topics in its index of "great ideas." Arnold Toynbee overlooked property in his twelve-volume *Study of History*. Elsewhere, his comments showed that he saw no important difference between public and private property. William H. McNeill's *Rise of the West* and Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* alike found property dispensable.

Such examples are easily multiplied. Indeed, in no general survey of Western civilization is the reader likely to find a discussion of property and its contribution to the emergence of the West as the world's preponderant political and economic power.

This is the lacuna that Bethell, the Washington correspondent of the *American Spectator*, has set himself to fill. His fascinating book is not a systematic treatise but rather a loose collection of 21 essays, filled with interesting information and keen insights and linked by a common thesis:

> When property is privatized, and the rule of law is established, in such a way that all, including the rulers, are subject to the same law, economies will prosper and civilization will blossom. Of the different possible configurations of property, only private property can have this desirable effect.

Since it is difficult in a brief review to do full justice to a book so rich in evidence, I will limit myself to a few points that struck me as especially noteworthy.

• In Bethell's account, the vision of a propertyless world, which has exerted so great an impact on Western thinking since the middle of the 19th century, rests on a philosophical doctrine first formulated by John Locke and then given political application by Claude Helvétius: namely, that human beings are devoid of innate ideas, their thoughts and feelings being wholly shaped by

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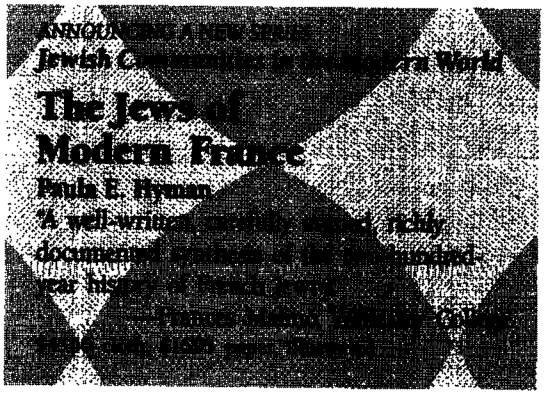

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sensory perceptions. This doctrine makes it possible to dispense with the notion of "human nature" and the qualities traditionally attributed to it, including the acquisitive instinct. Instead, acquisitiveness is depicted as the byproduct of a particular phase in social evolution.

From this premise, it follows that by changing the social environment, one can completely refashion humanity and produce a new type of being who cannot help acting selflessly. In *The Russian Revolution*, I myself placed heavy emphasis on this idea as the key to Communism and every other ideology of social engineering, and I can only applaud Bethell's attention to it. The calamitous influence this idea has exerted on modern history is far from being sufficiently appreciated.

• In a chapter devoted to the modern conception of rights, Bethell shows how, in the 20th century, even liberals have learned to draw a false distinction between human rights and property rights. Although the founders of the American republic regarded property as a fundamental element of human rights, Bethell is able to cite Theodore Roosevelt in 1910 contrasting the "rights of property" with the "rights of men," and FDR using almost identical language in 1936. The erosion of liberty in the 20th century, nearly absolute in totalitarian states and substantial even in democratic ones, has been justified by this spurious distinction.

• Bethell voices scathing criticism of the various failed land-reform programs in the third world that were financed and managed by the United States in the decades following the end of World War II. Ignoring the fact that their own country had grown wealthy on the foundation of landed property, the bureaucrats who conceived and ran these programs (he singles out for particular criticism Wolf I. Ladejinsky of the Department of Agriculture) concentrated not on guaranteeing property but on redistributing it: "Well-intentioned people felt that they could be entrusted with Leninist means"—i.e., the expropriation of large estates—"to achieve Jeffersonian ends." In country after country, Bethell demonstrates that land-reform programs failed because their intended beneficiaries did not feel secure in the possession of property that they had not purchased, and because in many instances the property was given not in individual ownership but collectively, preventing the emergence of a market in land.

• In another chapter, Bethell examines why it is that private ownership is more protective of the environment than public control. He cites the unprecedented devastation wrought on the environment by the Soviet regime, but the situation is basically no different in a democracy. One reason for this seeming paradox is that government adopts a single approach to environmental protection and often reverses itself arbitrarily, whereas private owners employ diverse approaches and adjust them as the situation requires.

Even more important is the fact that public ownership is subject to political pressure:

> Those in charge [of environmental protection] will assuredly not be philosopher-kings weighing an abstract public interest, but politicians worrying about the next election. Their goal is satisfying constituents, and to that end they will make log-rolling alliances with other politicians. . . . [By contrast], one of property's greatest advantages is that it has no time limit. It gives owners permanent control. Their decisions cannot be reversed by the next election, or altered by bureaucratic pressure.

In this connection, Bethell argues that in the United States, environmental problems are more common in states west of the Mississippi, where the federal government owns about a quarter of the land, than in the East, where it owns only 3.8 percent. In Brazil, he writes, the devastation of the rain forest is due not to the callousness of private owners but to the state, which owns and controls all the unclaimed land. It is the government that has built highways through the Amazon rain forest and distributes 100 hectares to any squatter who can show "effective use" of the land for one year.

• Bethell's concluding chapter, "China, Property, and Democracy," advances another unexpected proposition: that while economic growth depends on private property, it does not require democracy. For proof, he points to Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and, as of recent years, Communist China. But he also goes further, arguing that a nondemocratic society that allows private enterprise in effect gives up a great deal of its power. Thus, although the State Department, in its 1995 survey of human rights, characterized China as an "'authoritarian state,' in which the Communist party 'monopolizes decision-making authority,'" this, according to Bethell, is "inaccurate":

> Considerable decision-making authority—the decisions that people make in earning a living: the decision to sow, reap, harvest, barter, and exchange—[has] been largely delegated to the people. Only if life is viewed as a life in politics is the State Department's view correct.

It is, indeed, historically true that in today's advanced democracies, like Great Britain, property preceded democracy and paved the way for it. But here Bethell surely underestimates the importance of democracy, and the rule of law associated with it, for the ultimate protection of property rights themselves.

ANY BOOK as bold and unconventional as this one is bound to give rise to controversy, and *The Noblest Triumph* is not flawless. Bethell could have paid more attention to counterarguments. He does not ful-

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ly discuss the complexities of ownership in a situation like the contemporary one, in which the primary asset is often not physical property but credit. He might also have devoted more space to the crucial role played by private property in the Industrial Revolution in England and, contrariwise, to the way in which the late and imperfect development of private property in czarist Russia contributed to that country's economic backwardness.

But these caveats pale beside Tom Bethell's accomplishment—which is to demonstrate convincingly that without property, there is no economic progress.

Divine Rites

The Gifts of the Jews
by Thomas Cahill
Doubleday. 256 pp. $23.50

Reviewed by
Yossi Prager

That religious belief is no longer a taboo subject even in enlightened circles has already been much noticed; indeed, to judge by the number of books and television programs devoted to the subject recently, religion—and particularly the Hebrew Bible—would seem to be enjoying something of a renascence. Two years ago, Bill Moyers devoted a whole series on public television to the book of Genesis. Another manifestation of this same phenomenon would seem to be Thomas Cahill's *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*, which has been on the best-seller lists for months.

Cahill, the former director of religious publishing at Doubleday, is a self-described "gentleman historian." Throughout his new book, the second installment in a projected seven-volume series entitled *Hinges of History* (the first was *How the Irish Saved Civilization*), Cahill's own gifts are apparent. A lively and idiosyncratic tour of the Hebrew Bible, *The Gifts of the Jews* is written with humor, whimsy, and an engaging sensitivity to literary nuance. But the book aims for more than entertainment.

Taking us from pre-biblical civilization through Abraham, Moses, the Ten Commandments, David and his Psalms, the Prophets, and Ruth and Naomi, Cahill drives home a central point: the Jews introduced to the world a radically new conception of reality. Supplanting the ancient view that man's life on earth is cyclical and predetermined (except for the occasional intervention of capricious gods), the Bible teaches that the future is determined by our present actions. This being the case, human behavior is morally significant, man is free, and progress is possible.

This revolutionary view, according to Cahill, enabled the writing of history. The Bible marks the first attempt to record the history of nations and individuals as it occurred: not as myth, and not as hagiography, but as a chronicle of events and persons that is as factually accurate as its authors were able to make it. So compelling does Cahill find the biblical authors' intention in this regard that he is persuaded the events recounted there did indeed happen, at least in broad outline if not in every detail.

This is not to suggest that Cahill sees every word of the Bible as inspired by God, a view he attributes only to "fundamentalists." To the contrary, the very "patchwork nature of the Scriptures, their conflicting norms and judgments, outright contradictions, and bald errors," betray the errant hand of human beings. Besides, Cahill avers, any other view would constitute a

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Yossi Prager, *a new contributor, is North American executive director of the Avi Chai Foundation in New York.*

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Bronka Schneider

Edited with forewords by
Erika Bourguignon
and Barbara Hill Rigney

Bronka Schneider and her husband, Joseph, were two of the 30,000 Austrian Jews admitted as refugees to Great Britain between March 1938 and 2 September 1939. It was not until 1960, however, that Schneider wrote her memoir about the year she spent as a housekeeper, with Joseph as a butler, in a Scottish castle.

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slur on the Divinity: episodes like the "mass carnage and vindictive slaughter" that, the Bible says, God commanded the Jews to inflict upon the Canaanites are "unworthy of a God we would be willing to believe in."

But this brings us to Cahill's "take" on the Bible itself. For him, the story it tells is one of "evolving sensibility"—of progress both in human thinking and in relationships among men and between man and God. The very course of the Bible reflects this evolution: God's initial involvement with Abraham and the people of Israel leads, at first, to a physical journey through the wilderness from Egypt to Israel. Some hundreds of years later, the Bible rises to another level: the inner journey of the human spirit as expressed in the high poetic imagery of the book of Psalms. Soon enough, the Prophets begin demanding of the people not ritual and sacrifices but a personal morality built on the values of justice and humility. The culminating stage of this evolution is marked, for Cahill, by the story told in the book of Ruth—a story that recognizes, and rewards, the essential moral goodness of its two female protagonists.

IN MAKING his points, Cahill shows a remarkable sensitivity to the biblical text, and his enthusiasm for the Bible as a whole is quite contagious. As for his contention that the Bible introduces the "modern" sense of time, history, and the nature of human relationships, that, too, seems persuasive, at least to a lay reader. Still, for all its virtues, *The Gifts of the Jews* is a troubling book.

For one thing, Cahill in effect requires his readers to accept his word on the crucial question of which portions of the Bible are "almost certainly authentic" and which are later additions; which miracles are to be taken as miraculous and which as mere exaggerations of natural phenomena (the category to which, for example, he assigns the splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the manna that fed the Jews in the desert). Although *The Gifts of the Jews* has a general discussion of sources at the end, most of its assertions are undocumented, leaving the ironic impression that in tracing this story of the interactions of human beings with an omnipotent and omniscient God, it is not God but Thomas Cahill who holds all the answers.

And where do Cahill's answers come from? Often, they come from the same belief in human progress, in an "evolving sensibility," that governs his reconstruction of the Bible's own development from Abraham to Ruth. From his (superior) late-20th-century perspective, certain passages are approved as reflecting a putatively higher stage of morality while others are discounted as primitive. Among the latter, Cahill particularly singles out the laws declaring witchcraft, homosexuality, and incest to be crimes worthy of capital punishment. Whatever one may say about these laws—and Jewish tradition has much to say that Cahill ignores—it would seem incumbent upon an author who espouses an idea of God as the source of objective morality (as Cahill appears to do) to think harder before dismissing them out of hand as examples of a "lower" moral understanding.

A problem of another kind attaches to Cahill's highly imperfect grasp of Judaism. Both in his reading of the Bible and in his exposition of the values he finds embedded in its text, he pays scant if any attention to the specific framework in which those narratives operate and take their meaning. That framework is built on the premise that God revealed Himself to the Jews in the language of law.

Consider, for example, Cahill's own apparent favorite, the book of Ruth. This is, as he says, a story of human lovingkindness. But, far more, it is also the story of Jews living up to the values embodied in Jewish law. Critical junctures in the narrative—Ruth's following the reapers to pick up their gleanings, Boaz's decision to redeem the land of Naomi's deceased husband and to marry Ruth—cannot be fully appreciated except against the background of the laws of agricultural gifts to the poor and the rules for redeeming ancestral land that are explicitly detailed in the book of Leviticus. The book of Ruth itself, moreover, is the source of additional laws relating to marriage, property transactions, conversion, and even modes of personal greeting in Jewish life.

TIME AND again, Cahill's reading of the Bible eviscerates the essence of Judaism: the rules, traditions, and practices that for thousands of years have made concrete the otherwise quite generic values he extracts from the text. Thus, he applauds the Jewish notion that time can be made sacred, linking it to the concept of the Sabbath day described in the Ten Commandments. Basing himself on the relevant verses in Exodus, he writes that the Sabbath "call[s] us to a weekly restoration of prayer, study, and recreation (re-creation)." But he conspicuously neglects to cite another and no less important verse some chapters later in Exodus: "You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day."

It is, in other words, the distinctive ritual behaviors associated with this day—including the behaviors that Jews are enjoined to refrain from—that give the Sabbath meaning in traditional Jewish life, and not the (essentially Christian) notion of a weekly interval of study and recreation. And so, too, with every other value one would care to consider: sanctity, love, judgment, justice, humility, gratitude. Each of them, in traditional Judaism, is embodied in detailed laws, known collectively as ***halakhah***, whose observance enables—ensures—the fulfillment of the named value as well as the essential continuity (what Cahill calls the "unique miracle of cultural sur-

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vival") of the religious community that keeps those laws.

The Gifts of the Jews has been positively reviewed by both Jewish and non-Jewish reviewers, with Jewish reviewers voicing perhaps the more glowing accolades. One can readily appreciate their enthusiasm: any approbation of the Jewish contribution to society is welcome, still more one expressed with such verve and grace by a non-Jewish writer. But at a moment when the American Jewish community is in a condition of self-evident crisis, and when intermarriage rates have crossed the 50-percent mark, what is desperately needed is an articulation of Jewish distinctiveness. By making "the gifts of the Jews" seem, in effect, only a particularly brilliant harbinger of today's conventional secular wisdom, Cahill's well-intentioned book does a disservice to the Bible and misleads those who may be truly seeking to understand where the Jews come from and how, as Jews, they can best carry their traditions forward into the future.

A Joyless Lot

An Empire Wilderness: Travels into America's Future
by Robert D. Kaplan

Random House. 393 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
David Brooks

In the 19th century, Henry Adams, sitting astride his breeding and his erudition, elegantly noted the decline of civilization. Today that venerable tradition of refined pessimism is carried on by another New England institution, the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine. Over the past couple of years, the *Atlantic* has run gloomy essays on the perils of mad-cow disease, the threat of global cooling, the failure of welfare reform, the travails of federalism, the end of democracy, the scandal of our energy policy, the weakening of intellectual property rights, the collapse of our political system, and on and on. Some of these essays have been intelligent and even path-breaking, some rather less so; but their cumulative effect has been to make the *Atlantic* into the world center of genteel foreboding.

One of the main writers in the *Atlantic*'s stable is Robert D. Kaplan. A long-time foreign correspondent, Kaplan published an influential book, *Balkan Ghosts* (1993), about the intractability of ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and another, *The Ends of the Earth* (1996)—an earlier version had appeared as an essay in the *Atlantic*—arguing that social breakdown and conflict in the third world, and especially in Africa, were paradigmatic of the global future. Now he has returned to his homeland and written a book about the United States, excerpted in three issues of the *Atlantic*. The prognosis is not good.

David Brooks *is currently working on a book about the manners and morals of the educated class.*

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An Empire Wilderness is a travelogue. An Easterner himself, Kaplan drove through the American Mid- and Far West—Kansas, Texas, California, Montana, and other places—recording his observations and conversations. Three of his most fascinating stops were at military installations. He describes the course of study at an army post and officer-training center in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; takes us inside a nuclear-weapons facility near Amarillo, Texas; and venturing eastward, tags along with 54 military officers studying the Civil War battle of Vicksburg in Mississippi.

But Kaplan's purpose is not especially to limn the gap between American military and civilian culture. The premise of his book is rather that our national future can be glimpsed in the West—in towns like Omaha and Portland, suburbs like Orange County, and lonely outposts in places like Nebraska. His tour of these sites is designed to allow us to see where America itself is heading.

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In pursuit of this goal, Kaplan devotes a fair amount of space to deadpan descriptions of, for example, shopping in Orange County or the differences in body shape among waitresses serving different demographic groups. But he does arrive at an organizing theme: namely, that under the ruthless force of the global economy, our once-cohesive nation is disintegrating into isolated and radically unequal city-states:

> The same spirit of individualism that helped build the nation may henceforth deconstruct it, as new worldwide settlement patterns link similar communities by new computerized technologies and air travel while traditional states defined by geography wither.

Kaplan calls this the "medievalization of the continent," and he sees powerful intimations of it in the West. In time, he says, most of America will become a loose confederation of urban pods, divided between a few that are rich and globally linked and many that are poor at best, squalid at worst. These divisions, moreover, will exist not only among cities but within them. Take Santa Fe, New Mexico, which to Kaplan offers

> further proof that there are two Americas: the people who own stocks and mutual funds and have seen their assets rise dramatically in the 1990's and those who are completely dependent on wages, which have risen far less if at all.

Kaplan tries manfully not to fall in with run-of-the-mill declinists. "This book is not about the decline of the United States," he writes, but about its "transformation." Toward the end he cites Henry Adams himself to endorse the view that America may slip gently from its current primacy into "a silver age if not another golden one." But the overall tone of Kaplan's book does not suggest the coming of a silver age; it suggests something much darker:

> Perhaps only after democracy slips away, silently replaced by the power of corporations and other great concentrations of wealth in a society whose basic instincts are tranquilized by pharmaceuticals, masturbatory gambling, and the voyeurism of coliseum sports, will the true destiny of American reveal itself.

As this passage suggests, it is not only the down-and-out among the poor of East St. Louis or on a Hopi reservation or a Greyhound bus ("many ragged haircuts, bad complexions, grimy baseball hats turned backward, people coughing and smoking cigarettes") who elicit Kaplan's pessimism. Rather, what appears to distress him most is the spectacle of the middle class and the affluent. Confronted with the greenery of Phoenix, Kaplan laments: "[T]he fusion of trees and lush lawns maintained by sprinkler systems suggests that humankind may be pressing its luck here." High real-estate prices in Tucson do not set him to thinking about how desirable it is to live there but about "a century-old speculative bubble that has yet to burst." Kaplan's middle-class America is rampant with false consciousness, a place where sports fans are deluded and even casino winners, whether or not they know it, are a joyless lot.

IT MAY BE worth remembering that the country Kaplan is describing is America in the late 1990's—a country with low unemployment, low inflation, declining crime rates, high consumer confidence, manifold opportunities, and general satisfaction. It is far from a perfect place, but few have ever been so fortunate as those who live here. Whatever merit there may be in Kaplan's theory about the loss of national cohesion and our devolution into "city-states," his description of America is so skewed that it is often difficult to make the leap from the America he describes to the country that really exists.

Not that Kaplan is alone in his

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gloom. During his journey, he meets local observers, friends of friends, who tend to be every bit as disenchanted as he. An ex-cop talks about how society is growing more brutal. An elderly real-estate developer laments the way new housing developments create loneliness. Local academics testify to pervasive selfishness and racism. A cable-TV installer claims the future is exemplified by a little girl in a filthy trailer home, plopped down in front of the TV day after day to have her mind rotted by soap operas and game shows.

What is striking about the testimony of Kaplan's local experts, as about Kaplan's observations themselves, is how abstract they all are: no individuals ever leap out from them. Communities are described the way correspondents describe a refugee camp, as clumps of undifferentiated humanity. The poor are fat and unhappy, the rich are thin and self-absorbed. Of an affluent café in Omaha, Kaplan says that it is indistinguishable from affluent cafés on the East or West coasts. Really? When he comes across some happy workers in Texas, he writes, "Everybody here, despite race or geographical origin, looked and talked alike." Again, really?

Kaplan never defines what he means by the phrase "global economy," the alleged culprit behind the depredations he catalogues. Nor does he stop to ask whether his isolated communities are more or less isolated than they were in the past—in the 1880's or the 1920's or the 1950's. In these respects as in others, *An Empire Wilderness* seems less about a place than about a certain enduring sensibility. To judge by Kaplan's interlocutors, that sensibility, once the exclusive property of Eastern elites, has become yet another of our society-wide commodities, a way of marking one's cultural status as a sophisticate.

But there are other sensibilities—including the optimistic one whose premise is that people are actually quite resourceful when it comes to building their lives and that, under conditions of freedom, they tend to create communities and institutions to meet their aspirations. No doubt the truth lies somewhere in between, but perhaps the thing to say finally is that throughout American history, the optimistic sensibility has been a more reliable predictor of the national destiny than the pessimistic one.

Supply and Demand

The Fix
by Michael Massing
Simon & Schuster. 320 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Daniel Casse

Since the end of the 1960's, when drug abuse first surfaced as a widespread social problem in the United States, successive national initiatives have been launched to bring it under control. They have followed a dismayingly cyclical pattern.

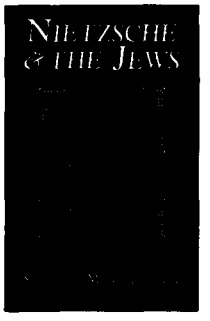
Typically, a new finding about the expanding scope of drug use is announced with great alarm. Cover stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* follow, and then comes a presidential initiative. A new task force or agency comes into being, with a budget featuring a greater commitment of funds. Then the downswing begins. Political conflict arises over the allocation of the money. Advocates of drug treatment decry the sums spent on law enforcement. Mayors besiege Congress with complaints that federal funds never reach their cities. Newspapers report the bickering, and public interest wanes. The crisis that only yesterday was rightly said to be poisoning an entire generation fades temporarily from view.

In short, it would appear that Washington is much better at responding to short-term public anxiety about drugs than at reducing drug use over the long term. Michael Massing, however, takes an even dimmer view. "It would be hard," he writes in his new book, *The Fix*, "to think of an area of U.S. social policy" where the federal government "has failed more completely."

For over a decade now, Massing has been subjecting our drug policy to skeptical inquiry in the *New York Review of Books* and elsewhere, picking up a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" in the process. In *The Fix*, he provides a detailed account of that policy from the Nixon era to the current moment. Interspersed throughout his narrative are portraits of what drug addiction looks like up close in New York City's Spanish Harlem. Though a critic of legalization, Massing believes that law enforcement is the wrong vehi-

Daniel Casse *is a senior director of the White House Writers Group, a public-policy communications firm.*

NIETZSCHE & THE JEWS
Exaltation & Denigration
Siegfried Mandel, Ph.D.
Foreword by Richard Huett



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cle for combating drugs. Instead, he favors vastly expanding treatment for heroin and cocaine addicts.

SURPRISING AS it may sound, Massing regards the Nixon era as a kind of golden age of enlightened drug policy. The hero of the tale, in his account, is Jerome Jaffe, a psychopharmacologist at the University of Chicago who, having established one of the earliest state drug-treatment programs, was summoned to Washington in 1971 to help address the rise in heroin addiction among GI's returning from Vietnam. Jaffe soon found himself installed at the head of the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse, which made him, in effect, the nation's first "drug czar."

According to Massing, Jaffe and his colleagues viewed themselves not as law-enforcement officers but as scientists responding to a medical problem. Their primary tenet was that reducing demand for drugs should take precedence over reducing supply. Translated into practical terms, this meant above all providing treatment to chronic abusers, while relegating to a subsidiary level of urgency any measures to curtail the distribution and sale of illegal drugs.

After the Nixon years, little in the history of U.S. drug policy meets with Massing's approval. He especially dismisses as ineffective the various domestic and international law-enforcement initiatives adopted by Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. (For part of the Bush period, I worked under William J. Bennett in the Office of National Drug Control Policy.) The country's heroin and cocaine addicts, he asserts, are desperate for a way out. To reach them, we should pick up where Jerome Jaffe left off and fund "treatment on demand."

The Fix does an admirable job of illustrating the unglamorous and destructive nature of drug abuse; its portraits of abject addicts and unspeakably cruel dealers are vividly drawn and deeply disturbing. Yet as a history of U.S. drug policy the book is seriously flawed, and as a set of policy prescriptions even more so.

To begin with, there is simply not much that is new in *The Fix*. The story it tells of the Nixon administration, for example, has been told before, most notably by Edward Jay Epstein in *Agency of Fear* (1977), a book that takes a far less charitable view of the period. There are also some curious gaps in Massing's narrative. While it is true that under Nixon the federal government embarked on an aggressive attempt to rehabilitate heroin addicts, Massing only briefly describes how Nixon also acted vigorously in the law-enforcement area, striking to break up heroin rings that were centered in Marseilles. This disruption of the "French Connection" was essential to making heroin temporarily harder to find in the United States, which in turn prompted many addicts to seek treatment. Though it may offer the key to whatever success Nixon's drug policy enjoyed, Massing tells us very little about this nexus between "supply" and "demand."

Nor is this Massing's only omission. In 1989, President Bush announced a 53-percent increase in federal spending on drug treatment. The Clinton administration has augmented funding for treatment to an even greater extent. How has the money been put to use? Has it made a difference? Though such questions have obvious bearing on the thesis of *The Fix*, Massing never explores them.

Another set of difficulties arises with Massing's policy recommendations. His favored program corresponds in every respect to the conventional wisdom of the "treatment community"—the loose collection of physicians, psychotherapists, and miscellaneous Ph.D.'s who believe that drug addiction should be handled on a voluntary basis by public-health authorities rather than coercively by the criminal-justice system. But the remedies offered by the treatment community are only partial at best.

While it is certainly true that addicts who successfully complete treatment tend not to relapse into continuous drug use and criminali-

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ty, a very high percentage of those who begin therapy subsequently drop out. Simply making rehabilitation programs available for the asking would therefore do little good. Indeed, Massing's own vivid portraits of addicts in Spanish Harlem show how difficult it is to convince those under the spell of narcotics to seek help.

A number of studies demonstrate, moreover, that an approach Massing shuns—namely, compulsion—is an essential tool for helping addicts turn their lives around. According to an investigation conducted by the Research Triangle Institute, as many as 50 percent of patients who enter drug treatment do so under some form of legal duress. Another study reveals that approximately 90 percent enroll in therapy only in response to a court order or when faced with the threat of imprisonment, dismissal from work, or the demand of an angry spouse.

In any case, hard-core drug use is by no means the crux of the problem that Massing makes it out to be. What he refuses to recognize is that every drug addict begins as a casual user; even Jaffe's efforts were designed, as Massing himself writes, "to find a way to prevent the dabblers from becoming addicts." Throughout *The Fix*, we are introduced to characters in Spanish Harlem who, while not yet junkies or crack-heads, are headed down a treacherous path. Yet Massing opposes all measures that would keep such dabblers on the straight and narrow. In particular, he sees no role for government in shaping attitudes toward drug use, especially among the young.

If we have learned anything over the past several decades, however, it is that public attitudes are vital in keeping drug use in check. Recent data from cities that test every arrestee for drugs—one of the best indicators of trends in consumption—show that cocaine is increasingly the drug of an older cohort whose appetite is difficult, perhaps impossible, to sate. Among younger arrestees, by contrast, the consumption of cocaine, while still high, has declined. This suggests that our recent mix of domestic law-enforcement measures and a less tolerant public culture may be acting as a deterrent for young people. Unfortunately, Massing has nothing to say about this fascinating trend or about what it may mean.

What he does say, over and over again, is that federal efforts to interdict drugs have consistently failed to produce a long-term impact on their availability. About this he is right. But that hardly means that all law-enforcement efforts are in vain. The New York City police department, for example, has carried out much-publicized operations to break up drug-trafficking in troubled neighborhoods. While such programs may offer only short-term success, they still have made life bearable again for many inner-city dwellers. Yet even they come in for censure in *The Fix*. The "lopsided reliance on enforcement," writes Massing in a passage of stunning irrelevance, is "sucking up resources that could have otherwise been used to hire more teachers, build more schools, and buy more textbooks."

For a journalist who has been writing about drug policy for so long and to such acclaim, Massing too seems to have remained caught in an infinite loop, in his case one of tired political thinking: his chief proposal is the creation of yet another federal drug office, this one modeled on Jerome Jaffe's during the Nixon years. If we are ever to break out of the analytic cycle, it will not be by ignoring or rejecting approaches that have actually worked, tendentiously rewriting history, or mindlessly resurrecting the discredited slogans of the past. This applies to those who devise and implement our drug policy, and it applies no less strenuously to their critics.

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Innocents Abroad

Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism 1959-1975

Library of America. Two vols. 1,715 pp. $70.00

Reviewed by
Algis Valiunas

ON A July evening in 1959, a Viet Cong raiding party killed two American military advisers and two South Vietnamese soldiers who were watching a movie in the mess hall of an army base outside Saigon. It was an unassuming start to a war, or more precisely to the American part in that war; but bigger things would soon follow.

War between North and South in Vietnam had been inevitable since the partition of the country in 1954 after French imperial forces were routed at Dien Bien Phu and France relinquished control of Indochina. Communist North Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh, was determined to bring the South under its dominion, and in 1959 began to supplement its policy of "political struggle" with "armed struggle." Serving as the North's principal agents were the Communist insurgents in the South—the Viet Cong. As for Saigon, its guide and protector had become the United States.

We had 900 soldiers in South Vietnam in 1960. In 1968, the number stood at 536,000. In 1973, we withdrew our troops, proclaiming "peace with honor." War with ignominy continued until April 1975, when Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese army. Now come these two burly volumes of American wartime journalism that not only record the fighting in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, but also chart the effects the war had on Americans at home and suggestively document the way that writing about the war influenced the war's very course.

Reporting Vietnam comprises pieces by some 80 writers—newspapermen, magazine reporters, and novelists trying their hand at stories they have not made up. The collection would thus seem to have things pretty well covered. That, however, is not the case.

WHAT IS in these volumes? In July 1962, as Hanoi gears up for "Hate America" month, Bernard Fall interviews Ho Chi Minh, who predicts a long fight and ultimate victory for the side of justice. Malcolm W. Browne witnesses the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk who is protesting the persecution of his faith by South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem. In Washington, Meg Greenfield attends a national antiwar teach-in. Don Moser shows a village in the South digging in against a Viet Cong terror campaign. Tom Wolfe goes to a Berkeley antiwar rally with Ken Kesey, who notes a featured speaker's resemblance to Mussolini. Specialist 4/C Jack P. Smith describes how his company was caught in a Viet Cong ambush. Martha Gellhorn details the effects of napalm on the flesh of children.

In 1967, Norman Mailer joins the march on the Pentagon, managing to leave in time to get back to New York for a party. Mary McCarthy goes to Hanoi in order to experience the American bombardment from the receiving end, but not a single bomb lands on her. Covering the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago for the *Village Voice*, Steve Lerner runs wild through the Loop with the street-fighting men who to him are the real American heroes. An anonymous reporter for Baltimore's *Afro-American* bites back his anger as the corpse of a black Green Beret paratrooper is declared unwelcome in the cemetery of his hometown in Alabama.

After the Tet offensive of 1968, Walter Cronkite pronounces the war a stalemate. In 1970, James A. Michener narrates the events leading up to the killing of four college students by National Guardsmen at Kent State University in Ohio, and peruses letters to the editor of the local paper after the shootings. Michael Kinsley, boy-reporter for the *Harvard Crimson*, debriefs several dovish professors after their meeting with a hawkish former colleague, Henry Kissinger.

Then there is John E. Woodruff lamenting the fate of the Hmong tribesmen of the Laotian hill country, who fought for the CIA and lost a quarter of their population to the war. Tom Buckley spends some time with General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, who became one of the era's most notorious figures by shooting a Viet Cong prisoner in the head for all to see on American television. At the Republican convention in Miami in 1972, Hunter S. Thompson denounces the main body of antiwar protestors as worthless doped-up scum. Sydney H. Schanberg reviews the Five O'Clock Follies, the daily briefing of Saigon correspondents by the American colonels responsible for public relations. In April 1975, Peter Arnett watches thousands of South Vietnamese loot the abandoned U.S. embassy in Saigon, right down to the document-shredder and the kitchen sinks.

IF I have conveyed a sense not only of abundance but of variety in this anthology, that is a misimpression. To the contrary, there is a uniformity to it that soon becomes numbing. A few exceptions aside, and I have included almost all of them in my list, the entire business is seen from basically a single vantage point—the vantage point of those for whom an American defeat would spell moral victory, even a victory for morality itself.

Among the newspapermen represented in *Reporting Vietnam*, most worked for the *New York Times*, the flagship of disaffection with the war. There are several long, very long,

ALGIS VALIUNAS *writes on cultural and literary matters for* COMMENTARY *and other publications.*

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articles from the *New Yorker*—and, to quote its then-editor, William Shawn, "We do not like war here." Michael Herr's *Dispatches* appears in full; widely considered the best book to come out of the war, it is a long howl of loathing for the supposed feral viciousness of American fighting men. And so forth.

The reader of *Reporting Vietnam* is directed on a progress toward salutary disillusionment. The opening entry, a brief and fatefully ingenuous article from *Time* about the first U.S. advisers to be killed, characterizes South Vietnam as a country "still independent and free and getting stronger all the time—to the growing chagrin of Communists in neighboring North Vietnam." Over the course of the next 1,700 pages, *Time*'s moment of unabashed patriotism, anti-Communism, and admiration for the South Vietnamese is proved archaic, benighted, doomed.

"Americans, because they are Americans, arrive in Vietnam full of enthusiasm and with the best of intentions," wrote Neil Sheehan of the *New York Times*, who came to Vietnam in 1962. By October 1966, this particular American, having been graced with a saving lucidity, was setting out to make his countrymen see as clearly as he. Where they may once have thought that South Vietnam, under American guardianship, would grow straight and true, prosperous and free, now they were to understand that the South's ruling class had cooperated with the Americans only in order to preserve its own traditional privileges, and that the one hope of social change lay with the Communists. The whole dismal spectacle of the war—villages bombed flat, orphans hustling to stay alive on the streets of Saigon, hospitals full of women and children burned by napalm—provoked Sheehan to wonder

> whether the United States or any nation has the right to inflict this suffering and degradation on another people for its own ends. And I hope we will not, in the name of some anti-Communist crusade, do this again.

Reporters like Sheehan were not the only ones to exchange the illusions they came to the war with for the illusions the war would leave them with. Media coverage made sure that nobody at home missed the point that the war itself was hell, or that our side was chiefly responsible for the hellishness. In a ricochet effect of the television age, revulsion against the war at home spread back to the troops in the field, and the troops' disillusionment then proved to the journalists that their own disillusionment was honorable and sage. John Saar, writing in *Life* in October 1970, quotes a young Army captain who does his duty but cannot resist calling his country's purposes into question: "Is there such a

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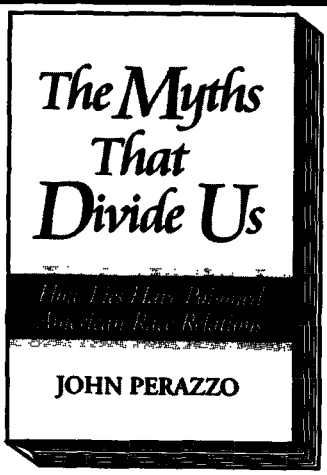

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thing as a moral war? I don't know. I think about it, and the doubt has been raised in my mind by the protest in the U.S." In a 1971 *Newsweek* piece by Karl Fleming, a young veteran who has just come home to his small Michigan town declares that the war is pointless—"It's not worth anybody getting killed for"—and that he wishes he had never gone. Later that year, Donald Kirk of the *Times* spends a month looking in vain for just a single young GI in the field who supports the war; what he turns up instead are widespread drug use and racial unrest, just like back home.

Although American heroism was surely no less common in Vietnam than in previous wars, in these volumes it is scarcely to be found. There is, to be sure, a thrilling testimonial by Tom Wolfe to the courage of Navy fighter pilots, who, even when their countrymen "seemed to have lost heart for the battle," continued to fly their missions against merciless odds. And there is a characteristically plain-spoken account by John McCain, Navy fighter pilot and now Senator from Arizona, of the five-and-a-half years he endured as a prisoner of war in Hanoi, under conditions of all but lethal barbarity. But that is about it. To judge from this collection, an American soldier was far less likely to fall on a grenade to save his comrades than to throw one at his commanding officer for cutting off the outfit's heroin supply.

ONE SOMETIMES wishes that American innocence were some purely literary notion, a quaint confection out of Henry James. Instead, it is a perhaps ineradicable trait of our national character, one that appears to be renewed with every generation and that affects the cynical no less than it does the truly innocent. During the Tet offensive of 1968, Michael Herr writes, he and some colleagues complained about "how *terrible* it was." A correspondent who had been covering wars since the 1930's laughed at them: "What the fuck did you think it was?"

It was what it had always been. Before Vietnam, the United States had fought three major wars in this century. In the worst of them, World War II, we allied ourselves out of necessity with a tyranny more savage than any other in history except the one we were fighting against; we bombed great cities to rubble, and a couple of lesser cities to radioactive ash. Even so, when we went to war again less than twenty years later in Vietnam, we could not do so without replenishing our cherished illusions about who we are and what war is.

The truth about our wars—that they always involve brutality and that they sometimes involve defending nasty regimes from being crushed by regimes far worse—may be more than a people that prides itself on its peaceableness and decency can bear. Is it a surprise, then, that books like *Reporting Vietnam*, the work of writers who think they have seen through the last of our national illusions, should perpetuate so many fatal ones of its own?

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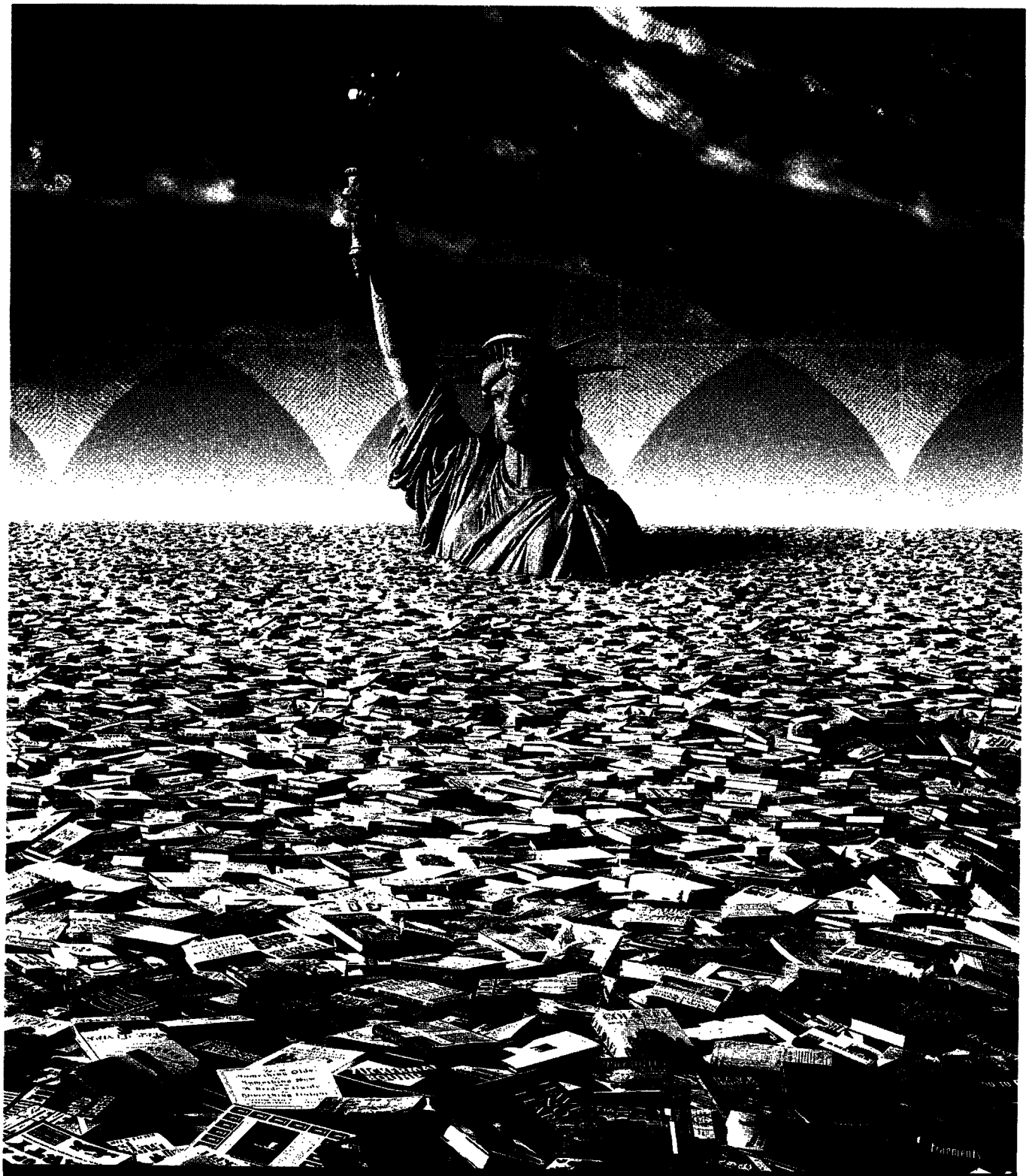

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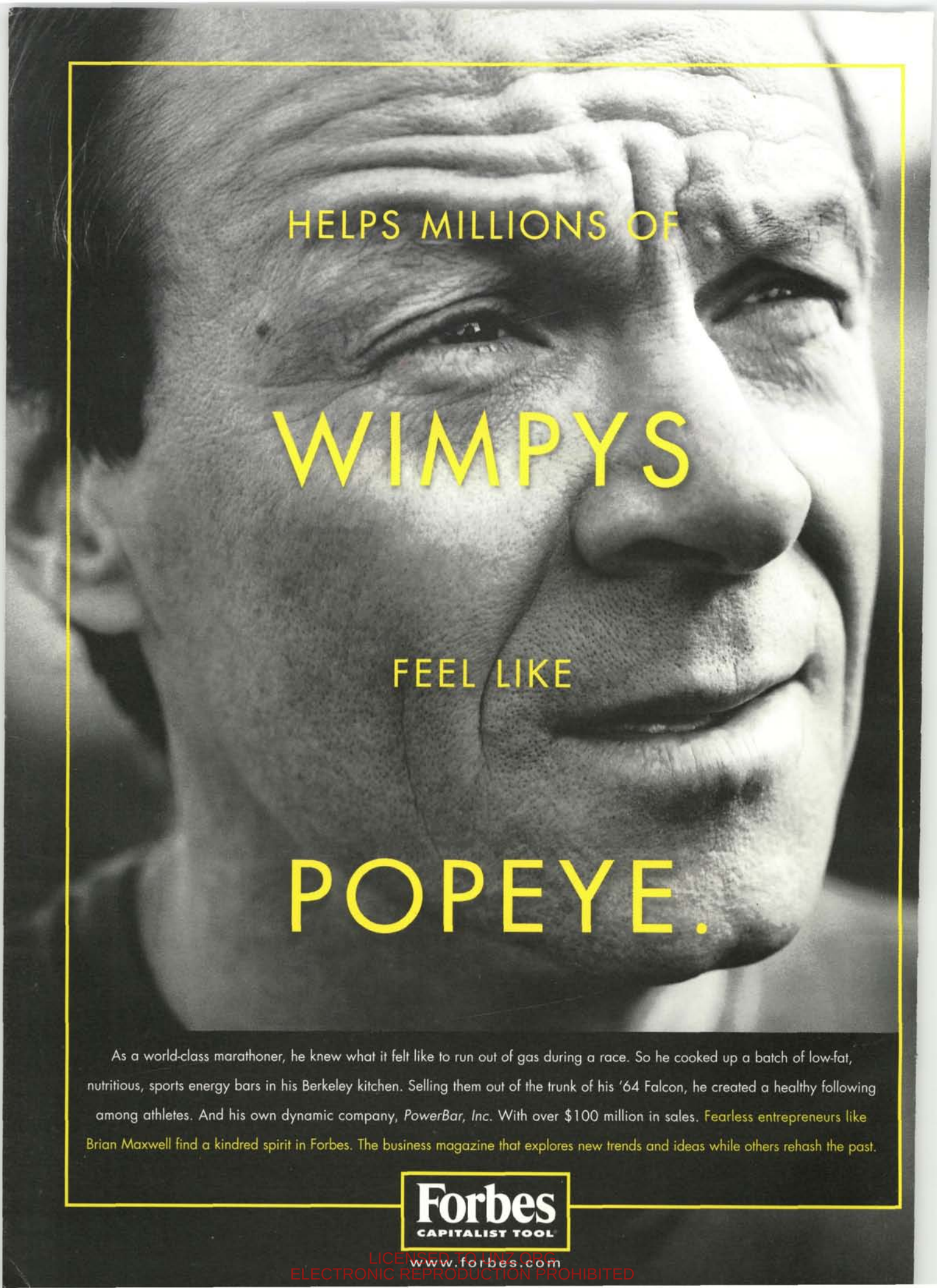

As a world-class marathoner, he knew what it felt like to run out of gas during a race. So he cooked up a batch of low-fat, nutritious, sports energy bars in his Berkeley kitchen. Selling them out of the trunk of his '64 Falcon, he created a healthy following among athletes. And his own dynamic company, *PowerBar, Inc.* With over $100 million in sales. Fearless entrepreneurs like Brian Maxwell find a kindred spirit in Forbes. The business magazine that explores new trends and ideas while others rehash the past.

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